

THE THIRSTY LAND

By the author of

TWO AGAINST THE AMAZON

"The remarkable story of a couple of young men who sought to pin-point the source of that vast river cradled in the glaciers which clothe the peaks of the Peruvian Andes. . . . Achieves an effect of reality . . . a sense of constant excitement. This is the quintessence of adventure"

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Liverpool Evening Express

"About the dwellers in the Andes he is interesting and informative. About the English (and, in their context, the Americans) he is devastatingly witty."

Illustrated London News



*John Brown with the map which told him they were in the middle
of Lake Ngami*

THE THIRSTY LAND

JOHN BROWN

The Travel Book Club
121 Charing Cross Road
London, W.C.2

THIS EDITION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH
HODDER AND STOUGHTON LIMITED

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
G. TINLING & CO. LTD., LIVERPOOL, LONDON
AND PRESCOT

Thanks are due to

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FOREWORD

THE world food situation demands the utilisation of the blank spaces on the map. This is an unpretentious account of a light-hearted journey across the great Thirst-land of southern Africa in the winter of 1952-53.

The old Boer pioneers named the area well, for hundreds of them died of thirst in the parched wilderness.

Our search in the waste of the Namib Desert and Kalahari, aided by the new tools of science, was for information and underground water resources. We visualized new towns and great cattle ranches on a Texas pattern, but knew that everything has to start in a small way. Work has already begun on a variety of projects and may, we hope, help to set a new pattern of survey, linking the theorist with the field work necessary to transform the wide open spaces.

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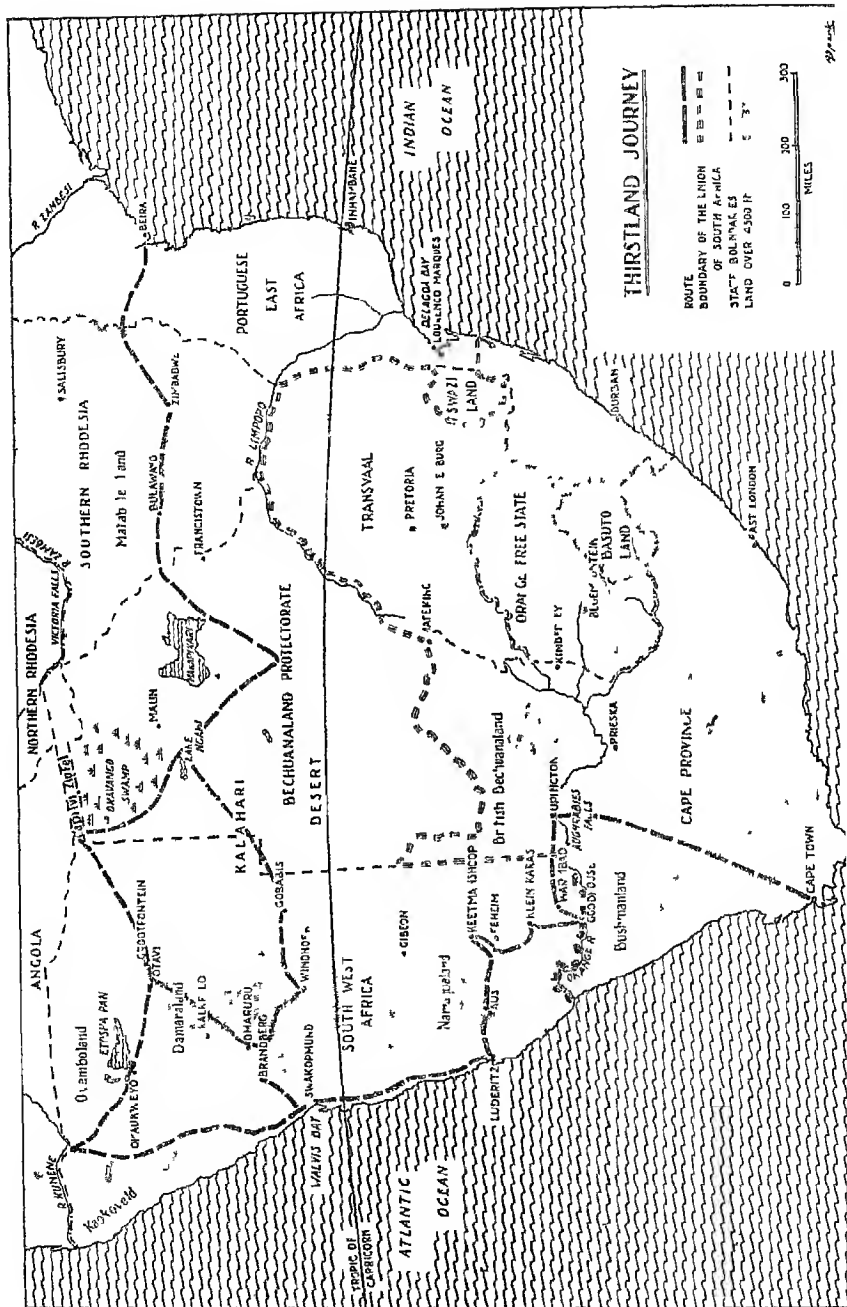
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CHAPTER I

THE PORTENTS ARE DOUBTFUL

*Planning against odds ; equipment for water-divining ;
opposition defeated.*

THE new Elizabethan age might be considered a cliché by the high-brows in England, but it did not strike us in that way. Dozens of expeditions were being planned or started. Mountains were being climbed, men lowered down volcanoes, and all kinds of strange craft appeared off the coast. There were rafts made of petrol tins, converted lifeboats headed for the Belgian Congo, and startling individuals with ketches and schooners, in search of who knows what.

My adventures in South America pin-pointing the source of the Amazon had not made me any better disposed to the prospect of leading a settled life at home. I was working now for the U.S. Third Air Force in England, and it was a broadening experience. I began to think of Tokio as a little trip, and of the entire European continent as a place for week-end leaves. Britain seemed a cramped little island. The idea of an expedition to Africa drew me more and more. My wife's one stipulation was that she was coming too. I had failed to raise enough money to take her with me to the Amazon, and she was resolved not to be left behind again.

Colonel Deneys Reitz, when he was High Commissioner for South Africa in London, had fascinated me with his stories of South-west Africa, the Namib Desert along the sea coast, and the possibilities of opening up the whole of the arid waste area. There were hardly any books on the area. Sir Malcolm Campbell had led one ill-fated expedition in search of gold, and was rescued by an aircraft. My friend Squadron-Leader John Barnett had flown over the 800 miles of desert from the Orange River to the border of Portuguese West, and told me of his exciting experiences.

Colonel Reitz had had big plans for the Kalahari, which he thought might be brought into cultivation by diverting the northern rivers. These plans had been shelved because of World War Two and afterwards because of the great increase in the cost of expeditions and surveys. The cost of sinking of a borehole to tap the suspected underground water resources had risen to over £500. The world was crying out for more food and the opening up of the arid zones. UNESCO, for whom I had written an article on Amazonia, sent me

masses of material dealing with their long-term plans for bringing the world's deserts into cultivation. It seemed to me that the chief need was for information on which the engineers could base plans. The new geophysical survey instruments would, I knew, enable me to plot water resource possibilities in a number of sample areas. The cost of such a trip would be negligible as compared with a full-scale government survey or a succession of boreholes.

I had already proved in South America that exploration could be run at a profit, and felt confident that I could repeat the experiment, not being a disciple of the modern school that teaches profit is immoral. When I examined the cost of various government expeditions I felt staggered at the immense expenditure and the slender results obtained. With some of the budgets, it seemed to me that vast territories could not merely have been surveyed, but conquered. However, as conquest is another word that has fallen from favour, perhaps it will be best to leave such considerations to people whose minds are better attuned to the wave-lengths of the times.

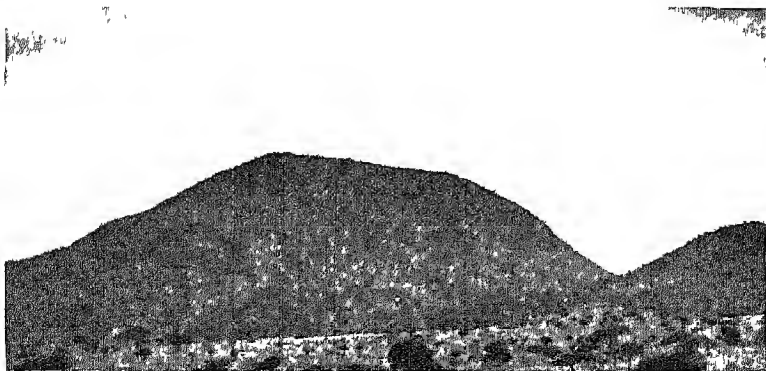
The explorer today spends a surprisingly large amount of his time in museums and libraries, and in correspondence with the Arch-Druids of learned societies. Some of these gentlemen were kind enough to suggest alternative areas for a trip, and even alternative subjects of study, as there appeared to be a fair measure of agreement among them all that I would never get the necessary permits for the Namib, Kaokoveld, and Kalahari. This was the first time I learned that permits would be necessary. In my innocence I had assumed that my presence anywhere in the sterling area would be welcomed, so long as I had travellers' cheques and a passport.

The prospects of studying the habits of nocturnal fauna in Kenya or of obtaining giraffe and pythons for sundry zoos did not attract me. How did one set about capturing a giraffe, for instance? They looked unsympathetic creatures to me, and I would rather wrestle with the problems of relativity than with those involved in boxing a giraffe and arranging its home comforts.

I asked one of the great industrial barons of our time if he thought I might get the necessary permits for an underground water survey. As always, he was definite. Not only would I not get the permits, but I would not be allowed into the territory under any circumstances. Did I not know that there were alluvial diamonds from the mouth of the Orange River north to Conception Bay, a distance of over 300 miles? I pricked up my ears at this news, being of a naturally greedy nature. The diamonds, it appeared, were found in the upper layers of loose detritus, which might be a few inches thick, or as much as 25 feet deep. The concentration of diamonds was brought about by the wind blowing from the south for most of the



Rhodes points the way from Cape Town



In Bushmanland



In Namaqualand Peggy gets brush for the camp fire



Desert cactus at Aus

year, and thus removing the finer materials from the upper layers.

My informant knew so much about police patrols, searchlights, barbed wire, prison sentences, X-ray examinations, and the cementing over of potentially diamondiferous gravels that I assumed he had been juggling with the idea of helping himself at some time or another—perhaps in a more robust age. I came away from this interview feeling very depressed, but I must have made a better impression than I thought, for next day I received an offer of a job in one of the mogul's many undertakings.

I respectfully declined the job, and realized that in any applications for permits I had better make no reference to gems or mineral rights whatsoever. Ignorance was clearly the line to take, a little complicated by the fact that I had just written two technical articles for the *Mining Magazine*. With a name like Brown, however, one can always pretend that it is some other person of the same tribe who has done the damage.

The reactions of my friends were discouraging. One man said, "You're after diamonds, old man—you can tell me. I won't give you away. Bring some back, and I'll help you to flog them in Amsterdam." Another said, "Don't give me all this bull about improving food resources and underground water. What are you *really* after?" A Fleet Street friend said, after hearing me out with ill-concealed impatience, "Don't tell me any more about opening up Africa. I'm sick of hearing about opening up and handing out. It's time somebody gave us something for a change."

The general view seemed to be that "Africa had already been done," and there was no point in flogging a dead horse. An advertising agent, who had the idea that I might come in useful for praising his patent foods, was disgusted at the very idea of Africa. "There's nothing in it," he assured me, "No point in going. Now if you were going to the Himalayas or somewhere, I could guarantee you supplies for months, and we could run the advertising space to coincide with your articles—you know, Camp One, Camp Two, and so on." He seemed to think that there was an airmail postbox at the foot of each mountain, with a cable station within walking distance.

My wife encouraged me to keep on with the idea. "You'll break them down in the end," she said, "The great thing is to keep at it." Even if we made a mess of the African trip, she pointed out, there were other continents. We could do them all, in turn, even if we had to wash dishes there and back.

My wife, who weighs only a hundred pounds, and is very fragile in appearance, has the mental and physical sturdiness that one often finds in small people. She had displayed an astonishing versatility

in various jobs, and this gave her the self-confidence to tackle anything. She is one of those people who can get the trick of a new job very quickly, after careful study of the expert at work. This is a talent greatly envied by people like myself, who are all thumbs, blunders, and stupidity until months have passed, when a very faint glimmer of intelligence can be discerned at the end of the tunnel. I have often had the feeling that whoever my ancestors were, they could not have been people who worked for a living in a bustling world.

So here we were, faced not by one desert, which my wife described as unworthy of us, but three, with no permits, prospects, or even a definite plan. Just a vague idea that we might do a little bit of good, and so justify our existence.

Africa had, of course, been crossed from east to west and from west to east before. Motor safaris have been in most countries. But no woman explorer had made the entire Thirstland trek before and there must, indeed, be few travellers who have made a coast-to-coast run from South Atlantic to Indian Ocean, taking in 1600 miles of desert, although Balsan's Panhard and previous trips deserve recognition.

Captain Verney Lovett Cameron, R.N., was the first man to cross Africa from east to west, Zanzibar to Angola, two generations ago. He was then a young lieutenant, and the trip took him two and three-quarter years. He arrived in Portuguese West suffering from scurvy, his body covered with blotches, but soon recovered, despite having had many attacks of fever. Of his three white companions, Robert Moffat died of malarial fever, and Dr. Dillon shot himself while suffering from malarial delusions, while being taken back to the east coast by Lieut. Cecil Murphy, R.A.

Studying the records, one is struck by the frequent changes in personnel and the number of disputes and misunderstandings. Take the 2nd Livingstone Search Expedition. Lieut. L. S. Dawson, R.N., was chosen as leader, but resigned and returned to England. Mr. New, another member of the team, also returned. Lieut. Henn, R.N., second-in-command, took over the leadership, but later on he also resigned. Oswell Livingstone, son of the great Scottish explorer, then took over, but he also gave up the idea. In this way an expedition came to nothing before it got properly away.

* * * *

I called on the shipping offices to find out about berths, knowing that anyone I asked to go with me would expect me to be a walking timetable. The cheapest class would do for me, I told the clerks—I was not fussy. And I would like a schedule of sailings. My

requests met with pitying smiles. Shipping space was completely booked up for a year ahead—all classes. I would be lucky to get a first-class berth even, a year from that day.

I tried all the shipping companies. It was the same everywhere. I wrote to individual directors, whose addresses I obtained by diligent research in the public library. I beseeched them to help. I pestered them at home and upset their dinner parties. It was useless. I made stealthy approaches to public relations officers, but apparently others had been there before me. The best they could offer was : "We'll make a note of you on our special list. If anyone makes a last-minute cancellation, you're in." This, I found, was a regular brush-off.

There were the air lines, of course. But the amounts they charged seemed to us astronomical, and would throw our Spartan budget out of gear.

There were the freighters. I tried them. They are run by very hard citizens, whose reaction was "What's there in it for me, boy?" Then there were the new regulations affecting the shipping pool, which more or less guarantee that fly-by-nights like myself will not be carried anywhere under the red ensign.

There were the Norwegian whalers which go to the Antarctic every year. When I first thought of these I thought our troubles were over. I had just had a nice letter from Thor Heyerdahl, and I had a friend at the Norwegian Embassy in London. I visualised a romantic trip, and even a bit of whaling. But the business men of Sandefjord, while expressing every good wish, said they could not fit us in, what with the problems of shipping equipment out, and customs, and making unscheduled calls which would incur big expense.

As far as instruments were concerned, there was no trouble. They were available, and in good measure. Wenner invented the original soil resistivity measuring plan, and the new methods were simply variations on the original. Four electrical contacts are made with the earth by driving four metal spikes—electrodes—into the ground in the area selected. The electrodes are placed in a straight line at regular and measured intervals. Between the outer electrodes a current of 1 ampere is passed, and the resulting voltage drop between the inner, or potential electrodes, is measured.

There are two variants, in general terms, of making resistivity observations. One is to employ a constant electrode separation, so that the current penetration of the earth is roughly constant, and the other is to expand the electrode system around midpoint, so that observations can be made for increasing depths.

The geophysical low resistance tester comprised a hand-driven generator and a direct-reading ohmmeter in a stout case, measuring

14½ inches by 7 inches, and weighing 23 lbs. A tripod is needed, and a spirit level fixed to the instrument to improve level setting on rough ground. Great accuracy of level is not required.

The geophysical earth tester was a more elaborate instrument, comprising two units. One of these is a hand generator, two reversing contactors, and a current indicator, while the other comprises a galvanometer, an ohmeter, a range switch, and an adjustable potential divider. Including the stand, tripod, and carrying cases, the total weight was just over 100 lbs.

Among the problems already solved by the use of these instruments was the location of ore bodies, underground rivers, and water-bearing rocks, besides the location of leaks in pipes due to corrosion. Locations down to 500 feet have been made, although most experiments are concerned with shallower depths.

The field procedure in prospecting for underground water is simple. Wooden pegs are used to mark key points on the traverse line. My problem was to devise a method by which local surveyors could recognize potential bore-hole areas in a country largely unexplored. I decided to sink steel pegs with coloured tops in V patterns, easily recognizable from the air against the sombre desert. Flags and similar markers were clearly impracticable because of the strong south wind, carrying mica particles, that blows across the coastal desert. A treatment of peg tops with fluorescent paint was another suggestion we made, for good measure.

I knew if we could locate potential underground water resources and mark sites, or map them, it would not be a difficult task to organize engineers and labourers for the sinking of bore holes, particularly if we could point to an early success. The desert could be irrigated, cattle could thrive, and vast areas of soil reclaimed for cultivation. A new life would be possible for the black settlers, who had been sunk so long in hopeless poverty. What the possibilities were could be seen from the reports that after one of the rare rainstorms of the Thirstland area, there were patches of green to be seen the very next day all over what had seemed to be a hopeless waste of sand and rock.

In broad terms, a geophysical survey of this nature can be described as the use of mechanical water diviners. Ground can be covered very quickly, 800 yards of traverse being possible from one instrument position. The important principle is that rock resistivity is not a characteristic of the rock itself, but is controlled by the moisture within the rock pores plus the salinity of the water content. The current is conducted through the rocks by the electrolytes in the sub-surface material, and the greater the moisture content, the lower the resistivity.

None of these instruments is difficult to understand or work. Practice is all, as in so many other branches of science. I hold strongly to the view that the average student of the humanities is capable of extending his theoretical and practical studies into many scientific channels, and is only inhibited therefrom by the tempo of discovery, and the prevailing attitude in Europe of adoration and humility before the great Mumbo-Jumbo of technical obscurantism. Because a man has a degree in theoretical physics it does not follow that his work automatically acquires a sacred quality, and that his utterances must be regarded as comparable with the Delphic oracles. The answer is—do not bow down, but crash in. An average London or New York reporter could obtain a scientific degree himself after three years of application, and thus invest himself with the lama's yellow robe.

Explorers have to face a good deal of comment from the higher criticism after completing a mission today. But a man who has spent nine weeks alone on a glacier cannot be expected to remain cool when asked why he did not take with him the very latest ablatograph. No doubt he would have had one if he could have afforded it. The only thing to do is to obtain the latest resources of science, and if these cannot be bought or borrowed, to make do with what one can find. To wait around indefinitely for help from institutions is to condemn oneself to years of heartbreaking disappointment. I know one man who has been waiting four years to mount an expedition, and looks like waiting another four.

In my case, I have been lucky. Institutions and commercial firms have been very forthcoming. My wife and I have pestered and pursued them with the insistence of a ratel chasing a mamba, believing that such bodies exist to further the work of the pioneers. As my wife said to one group of business men, "You should thank us. We are bringing romance and adventure into your sordid lives!" Who said bankers have no hearts. A great banker—one of the most famous in the world—was so stirred that he uttered the memorable words, "We shall look forward to reading the account of your achievements, and will try not to feel that, indirectly, they are also ours."

The achievements, however, lay in the distant future, if they were to materialise at all. The portents remained doubtful. Two scientists who were to have accompanied us advised that an unexpected visitor was due in the stork, and geophysics must take second place to ornithology. Buck Jenner-Parson, ex-Royal Engineers officer and racing motorist, had a bad crash at Boreham races. It was doubtful if Sebastian Snow, my doughty *compañero* of the Andes, would be fit enough in time to make the journey. Snow's source-to-mouth

voyage down the Amazon had won him world-wide acclaim, and when he returned to Liverpool from Brazil he was given a civic reception, and found a press conference waiting for him. This was a great shock to a young man who had expected to return to normal anonymity, or, as an unkind critic said of us "to that oblivion from which they should never have emerged."

After months of hard work, we solved our problems. We had worn the opposition down until it was glad to get rid of us.

CHAPTER II

NOT A RIOT TO BE SEEN

*Encounters aboard ship ; seeing Cape Town ; Myers and Coetzee
join the expedition.*

THIS book is not concerned with politics in southern Africa. The sub-continent means to me the ruggedly independent Boer, moving inland from outspan to outspan; the highly individualist British explorer; and the gold and diamond-seekers from every country, opportunist, reckless, self-confident and ambitious—the antithesis of the unskilled factory worker.

As in the United States the memory of the Great Trek and the frontier way of life lingers on. To the sophisticates of Chelsea, Greenwich Village and New Mexico these traditions may seem narrow and confining. But is not their own reaction against machine civilization a distant echo from an outlaw of the past ?

The new countries like the United States, Canada, the Union of South Africa and the Rhodesias and Australasia were built up by the younger sons of the best families, aided by the homeless, the hunted, and the brigands. Who could wish for a better coat of arms ?

In southern Africa the Boer dream of a Promised Land, remote from the Pharaohs of the Old World, and the Englishman's dream of a paternal colony in which his clipped speech and tea parties would have a background of native songs, have both faded. People are more complicated than they seem. Put a book in a man's hand and he may move the world.

* * * *

To say that our African expedition excited people would be gross exaggeration. I began to feel sorry I had ever thought of it. My wife seemed the only person in the country who was interested. The press published occasional photographs of my wife and me struggling with pieces of equipment. In these I looked like the kind of sordid type who keeps an antique shop and is suspected of being a 'fence.' The cameramen who visited my flat asked if I had any trophies or suchlike that could be portrayed with me, no doubt with the laudable idea that anything would be an improvement. They mentioned solar topees. I asked if other people dressed up

in foggy London in topees, shorts, and mosquito nets, and I was assured that they had, and did.

People came round to say good-bye. I was advised to bring back a photograph of a charging lion, as this, it was claimed, would be worth a lot of money. What I was to do after the lion had charged nobody knew. Several people advised me to get good close-ups of buffalo, wild elephant, and crocodiles, as if I were incapable of such ideas myself. It was clear that to them Africa was a rather larger Regent's Park Zoo.

We all try, or should try, to like our fellow-men. It is not easy. One of the difficulties is that they so quickly lose interest in one's own troubles. Tell someone else, even your best friend, about your troubles, and in a very short time a martyred, or at least a hunted, expression will appear on his face. Keep on, and he will shift uneasily from foot to foot, saying, "Well, it can't be as bad as all that," or "We must look on the bright side," or "Funny thing you should say that, it reminds me of. . . ."

On the ship bound for Africa it was my turn to shift the weight from foot to foot. One of those dreadnought-size elderly ladies who seem to live in what are called superior residential hotels was explaining her problems. I could not see what she had to worry about. Trifles, and three thousand pounds a year to deal with them. The world seems full of these ladies. What happens to their husbands?

I kept saying, "Really?" and "Good heavens!" at what seemed suitable intervals, while the drone went on. But when she stopped suddenly, and I smiled, saying, "It's amazing," she scowled and said, "What is?" Muttering, "The whole thing," I shambled off.

On shipboard, chance acquaintance flourishes into something like nickname friendship in a few days. Flirtations at Folkestone may be grand passions at Grand Canary. It is mostly propinquity and boredom. In a village one might see a girl only twice a week, but on a ship there are fifty opportunities a day. If people do not read there is nothing much else to do. I have never known a shipboard friendship amount to much ashore. The cold grey atmosphere of customs sheds and baggage masters withers it away. "Don't forget to write," they shout. But who does?

There were the usual sports fiends, who organized everyone with the efficiency of house captains at girls' schools. No one had read the books in which authors deride these affairs. Things have not altered for fifty years. My wife, who is not at all a sporting type, resisted the overtures and bullyings of what she called "a monstrous regiment," pleading an old ping-pong wound. I heard snatches of conversation among the sports organizers that were incredible in

their banality. The clichés and slang of not one, but of two generations ago was current among them. Some of these women were very masculine in appearance, with thin moustaches. The men tended to be small, alert, bossy people with sharp eyes.

My wife's blistering opinions of the sports committee were not shared by me, as I felt vaguely that it was all A GOOD THING, and had it not been for my wife I might have been taking a part in the Crossing the Line atrocities, and who knows what else?

There was a female monster aboard, who distinguished herself going aboard by seizing a chair and charging through the crowd ahead. This lack of queue-consciousness was rightly resented by the English who, when they got aboard, queued up for everything, even meals, until told by grinning stewards that it was unnecessary. Ten years training cannot be cast off in a day.

Second day out I saw the monster take six cakes and two cups of tea for herself from the steward. Later, when selecting a deck chair for herself, she chose that at the bottom of a pile, and strewn the rest all over the place. She strode off, ignoring the débris. In the library she fell against a pretty girl, who screamed "My nylons!" Somerset Maugham should have been aboard to do justice to the monster, whose motto was *Sinn Fein* (Ourselves Alone). She was a two-legged challenge to the whole of western civilization.

Off Dakar my wife and I were moonstruck, a new experience. We had stayed out on the promenade deck too long in the pale white light of the tropical moon. Comparing notes, we found we had both had the strange feeling of not looking at water, but at heaving lava reducing us to a speechless unease.

Radiograms were delivered to us from people in South Africa and the Rhodesias, offering to join us. These must have been sent on impulse, we decided later on. In any case, we did not pick any of the senders. Replying to them, I found myself for the first time among people who send away long messages from ships at sea. I had often wondered what these messages were about, and guessed they dealt with selling Kaffirs or buying United Steel, stopping at a million dollars, and so on. But it seems not. The messages I saw people writing were all to uncles and suchlike relatives, advising them to meet them at all kinds of dull-sounding places. Another illusion gone.

At Las Palmas, in the Canaries, we kept up our record of living on the country. We had a good time without spending a cent. Economists may say that such manoeuvres are impossible, but economists are not much good with their own speculations, and if a man cannot get out of the red himself why expect him to get the nation out?

The Spaniards were as courteous as ever, and prices were cheap. Derelicts lay about in the sun, too lazy to beg for alms. There was a flourishing trade in a dozen currencies. In the dockland area living costs were very low, and with the perfect climate a hobo would be able to last out a month on a dollar. Our opinions were not shared by every visitor. We heard people complaining about high prices. They had been in taxis to the high-hat places. A business man bragged of a meal for only half a crown. But the hobos paid only 2d. for a plate of fried fish, and 3d. for wine. Our self-congratulations were enhanced by my winning the pool on the ship's daily run. "Keep it up," said my wife, "and we'll be operating on the Jo'burg Stock Exchange at this rate. Anything goes there." She pointed out a woman who wore a huge diamond ring. "She's from Jo'burg, and that's not a ring she's wearing. It's a diamondiferous area."

My wife, I should explain, is not one of those who ridicule riches as a defence mechanism set up by personal poverty. Her idea is that money should be spent while one is still young enough to enjoy it, so that a fund of happy memories can be stored up against the shawl and knitting days. Such a mental outlook, while suitable for Ann Bonney, the woman pirate, in the days when she was one of the scourges of the Caribbean, can hardly be reconciled with that of advanced modern thinkers. When I reminded my wife of this, she recalled the occasion when I took her out to dinner with some of the pundits of our age, whom she irreverently described as "a bunch of stuffed shirts."

As some Yorkshire sage remarked, "There's nowt as queer as folk." Everyone is different, and appearances mean little. There was a man in the next cabin who came to bed "loaded" most nights. About twice a week, in the small hours, I was roused by his crashing to the deck from his top bunk. He never groaned, but lay there silent until he had recovered strength to climb back. During the day he lay about in a deck chair, recovering his spirits towards sundown.

There was an elderly lady who took murder novels to bed. Her companions were disturbed every night by her piercing screams and dull moans, which frightened them. They lay trembling, while the old woman gobbled and howled. When they aroused the screamer, she was unmoved and indifferent, remembering nothing. We were asked for advice, and in the end heavy pressure was put on her to change her style of literature. Love stories were introduced, and peace was restored.

A middle-aged lady confessed to us that she was a split personality. She felt that she was walking beside herself, watching her *alter ego*

perform. The English specialists she had consulted had been unable to do anything for her, and she was going to try those of South Africa. What can one say to a *doppelganger*? I have a regrettable urge to laugh when people tell me their ailments in sepulchral tones, and have to dig my nails in my hands to prevent it showing. My wife, a more self-controlled person, is useful on such occasions, with ready sympathy and talk of doctors, and suchlike tribal folklore. One of these days I will burst out, howling like a jackal. It will be poetic justice if someone does the same to me, one day. But there it is. As a child I was overcome with the same symptoms in church and had to crouch down behind a pew, purple-faced, biting a cushion, while people whispered "That boy is not fit to be with decent people."

Several passengers had ideas of their own about how the ship should be run. A woman, told she would eat with the purser, said, "Now I can tell him how things should be properly run." She meant it, too. A man wearing a blazer said, "We're off our course. It's those gyro compasses. They throw everything out." He invited me to compare the figures of the day's run with the chart. "We just can't be here," he said, "it's impossible."

"Where are we, by your reckoning?" I asked.

"Well to the north. I reckon we'll be a day late." I encouraged him to go up on the bridge and have it out with the skipper, but he refused. "They'd only brazen it out," he said. A week later I saw this man with a chart, telling a young friend the same dismal tidings. "Where are we now?" I asked.

The navigator was not disturbed. "Did you know that one of the officers has not been on this run before?"

"Maybe we'll finish up in the Antarctic," I said. "The icebergs will be a clue."

The navigator flushed. "It's not funny," he said. "How would you like to be a day late for an important business appointment?" When we sighted Table Mountain I sought for this man, with the intention of telling him it was the Sugar Loaf, and we were entering Rio, but he had gone to ground.

I asked some of the South Africans aboard about the wild life of their country, hoping to get some useful tips. They seemed to take my questions very seriously, but I got only monosyllabic replies. Next day they seemed to avoid me. I did not realise then that most South Africans, and most whites throughout the continent, have seen fewer wild animals than the average Londoner or New Yorker, who has fine zoos to visit. Most white people live in cities, and have plenty to do without making long treks into the wilderness in search of big game. The novice would see little, in any case, as most

animals sleep during the day, and keep well out of the way of humans if they can.

* * * *

We had heard so much about Cape Town's beauties that we were quite prepared to be disappointed. The city was even better than its reputation, and we went about uttering cries of "Look at that!" and "Isn't it wonderful?"

The Customs were kind about my improbable luggage. There was a new rule forbidding the import of 303 ammunition, and a technical hitch over an unnumbered Martini rifle, but ingenuity conquers all, or nearly all.

The Africans did not look a bit downtrodden. The first contacts I had reminded me of encounters with New York taxi drivers, who are among the world's leeriest citizens. Prices were something of a knock, however. They usually are. No matter how carefully one draws up a budget at home, something happens to knock it endwise. The statisticians who draw up charts of comparative living costs must live very prosaic lives, as wherever I go I cannot live on double their minimum. My wife and I decided to economize, but after a few days we found we were spending more than we would if we had not started an economy drive, and reverted to plain muddling through, which is cheaper.

The first thing to do was to see the sights, American style, in a whirlwind rush. After that the traveller can settle down on seeing what the place is really like. There was such a lot to see. Up Table Mountain, bathing at Sea Point, fishing all over the place, the aquarium with a nasty octopus—a real small boy's treat—Groote Schuur, the vineyards (the wines were first-class), ritzy night clubs and restaurants, with enormous steaks, and beautiful Dutch colonial houses. There was twice as much stuff in the shops as in London or Paris, and an orgy of buying was only prevented by our tight schedule and thin purse.

Hospitality was on a truly frontier scale. If we had accepted all the invitations we had we should have made our homes in the Peninsula for the next three years. People we had known only an hour said, "Come and stay with us for a few weeks until you are properly acclimatized." What a place, with about 300 days sunshine a year, huge quantities of meat, fresh eggs, fruit, flowers, and cream in little pots! Servants who brought in pots of coffee every morning while we lolled in bed, drew our baths, grinned happily at a word of praise—this was the life. We visited (against the advice of our hosts) the notorious District Six, said to be full of dagga (marijuana)

smokers, illicit still owners, and coloured gangsters. We emerged unscathed. Then we did the Malay quarter, dockland, and a bit of shacktown outside the city. We had no bother with anyone. There seemed to be more white than coloured panhandlers trying to put the bite on visitors. I could see that trouble would start easily from some of the poor whites with chips on their shoulders, who sometimes bawled, "Don't touch me, nigger!" if a coloured man went near them. Drinking was on a Viking scale, and some very poor specimens of white humanity came lurching out of the saloons looking for trouble and as usual with that type, picking on some unfortunate negro.

In the saloons I was introduced to the world of 1913 days, for women were barred. There were bars for Europeans and non-Europeans. Wine and spirits were very cheap, and apparently very potent. Men shouted and swore at each other, slapping people on the back and making a lot of fighting talk. If this was the masculine world that existed before World War I they can have it.

Pathetic drunks stumbled into the bright sunshine, saying, "Got to look after the little woman. She couldn't come out—scared of these goddam gangsters. Did you read what they did yesterday—cut up an old woman upcountry?" They were great buyers of bouquets to take home to show the little woman they had not forgotten her. I felt sorry for the little women.

I made the usual blunders about buying papers from *Nie-Blanks* kiosks in the station. It had never occurred to me that there would be separate counters for each race. The Africans were upset, too, as my error might have driven them absent-mindedly to the *Blanks* (whites only) counter, and got them into insults or trouble. Then there were the separate lavatories, post office seats and sections, and the many exits and entrances. This slowed us down, as we had to look at every hole in a wall to see if this was ours.

One of my hosts told me about a group of Africans who decided to defy the pass laws in one town. As they had no legal right to be in it, they presented themselves at the police station and went in, demanding to be arrested. This was part of a disobedience campaign. The policeman said, "You have no right to be here."

"That's right, arrest us."

"I can't. You've come in the *Slegs Blanks* door. That's not for you."

"All right. Arrest us for that, then."

"I can't. You'll have to go round the corner to the *Nie Blanks* entrance. The officer there will look after you."

"What about if that door is shut?"

"You'll have to wait there."

All the South Africans we met, Afrikaners and English, agreed that their problems were not understood in Europe or America. The most fantastic lies had been told about them, and their friends abroad seemed to think they were living above a volcano. I found much in common between the English and Afrikaans sections, and nothing of the rude hostility I had heard about. But it was easy to see why their ideas were not understood in the northern lands—they were so very different. The English emphasis on security, safety first, and love of the unEnglish that has been such a feature of the last thirty years had withered under the hot sun of Africa. As for the Boers, they had always been different, and looked back to the *Voortrekkers* for their ideas, not forward to the atomic age.

The politicians seemed to be mostly "Vote for the English and your daughters will have to marry Kaffirs" types, or frank-faced men who described themselves as honest and sincere and cried, "I love you all, my dear, dear friends." For £1,400 a year they could hardly do less. They were oratoreaders—bull-throwing specialists.

We had plenty to think about, however, without getting bogged down in the intricate web of local affairs.

One of my first jobs, after catching up on ten meatless years, was to find suitable companions for our trip. *South African Morning Newspapers* had sent me a list of likely people, and I had been given five names by the American Embassy in London. There was no lack of volunteers, especially in the saloons, where my companions sometimes insisted they were coming with me whether I liked it or not, although they did not know what I was after, or where I was going. Details like that did not matter in South Africa, they said. Men made up their minds, and went off. There was a lot of truth in this, too. The shadow of Rhodes and the ox-waggoners still hangs heavy. Solicitors who have led blameless lives in Durban and Port Elizabeth are tormented by the fact that they have never seen a lion outside the Kruger Park, or held a strange palaver with a sinister chief. I began to like the South Africans. It was difficult not to like them, with their lack of self-consciousness, that bugbear of "civilized" areas, their open-handedness, and the love of adventure for its own sake.

It was a classless society we were in. A real democracy, among the whites. A railway worker is a personality, with views that are listened to. There is not the peculiar class distinction based on job and accent that disturbs so many visitors to the Old World. A bus conductor could argue with a lawyer and a doctor here. Such meetings were common, and refreshing. Walking down Adderley Street, the "Mayfair" accents of broad-beamed tourists from the old country seemed most peculiar. Also their style of speech—

"Now isn't that too, too, sweet?" The films made in Britain seemed tame and lifeless, all talk and no action, out in the Union. I had noticed the same thing in South America, although in London it seems quite natural.

It is impossible to tell what people are like from a single meeting, so the job of selecting team members was very difficult. How does one pick people for jobs? Do it well, and you get a reputation as a brilliant organizer. But no one can teach the knack. I am prejudiced against oral examinations, as I invariably make a bad impression myself. A man's record should surely be a better guide to his abilities than the lies and bluff he can put up in an unchecked talk. But what if a man is young and has no record?

I had to cruise around the Union seeing people, and learned that journeys in South Africa were something like journeys in the Americas. Days, not hours, measured the trails. Little runs of twelve hundred miles lay between cities, and people setting out for the Rhodesias were laying in enough food to last an English family a year. I had heard people saying, "I ran over to Durban (or Jo'burg) last week . . ." and had somehow imagined these places within easy reach. But some of them were eight hours away by 'plane, counting the drives to and from airports, and so on. And as flying is the worst way to see a country, despite the propaganda, I decided to make a few quick trips by rail and car, and choose any likely lads. My wife pointed out that if they were really keen to come with us, they would have already sought us out, and this was probably true.

I picked Bob Myers an American who had been on a previous expedition, and Luke Coetzee, who spoke Afrikaans, English, and German (useful in South-west) and a few words of Bantu. Myers was familiar with water-seeking expeditions, as he had worked for rainmaking firms in Arizona. It was very funny to hear his account of the battles between the ranchers who wanted rain and the farmers who didn't. Apparently the rainmaking aircraft have rivals in sun-makers, and there is a comical war in the south-western states that few people outside America know about. At the end of 1946 the General Electric Company scientists under Dr. Irving Langmuir discovered the seeding process of making rain. Dry ice, dropped from aircraft on certain types of cloud, starts off precipitation. The farmers who do not want cloudbursts get very angry when the rain-making aircraft buzz over their fields like hornets, and they have been paying sunmakers, who work an overseeding system, dropping more dry ice at higher altitudes, and producing a cold belt of air that prevents heavy rainfall. The situation has been complicated by ranchers who complained that the rain they ordered had not fallen in their area, but on farmers some miles away, whose fruit crops

were ruined. The tobacco growers, I learned, had done best of all. Their rainmakers had scored bulls-eyes every time. This fantastic situation has caused endless legal trouble, and as some of the judges maintained that the rain and sunmakers were interfering with Providence, strange decisions were handed down, and appeals were common. Over the previous three years the situation had clarified a little, the smaller and less efficient firms fading out. But three major companies were left in strong competition for rainmaking contracts, the best source of revenue. I could not discover what happened when an unscrupulous rainmaker was offered more dollars to be a sunmaker after his aircraft had started off. Knowing what I did of the difficulty of hitting a ground target, I was surprised that the ranchers were willing to pay good money to the modern wizards. But they are willing, and they do pay. A wide vista of possibilities opens up.

Coetzee looked upon this interference with nature as an example of American credulity, but I was not sure, and Myers said it could be done. As he pointed out, after uranium nuclear fission creating new elements like neptunium and plutonium, with more to come, why strain after a gnat like weather-making? Coetzee looked on the world as a place full of useless machines, helping people to get somewhere, but unable to tell them what to do when they got there. He had swallowed all the stories of the early settlers, and was full of the spirit of the ox wagon and the tough Boer farmer, rifle in hand. Piet Retief meant more than all the inventors. As far as he was concerned, his people did not lose the Boer War. With glee he pointed out that 30,000 Boers killed 22,000 British, and wounded thousands more. It had cost over two hundred millions sterling to deal with the commandos, and several generals were still in the field when a halt was called. The Boers, he claimed, in answer to my question, had only five thousand killed. The press had done a great disservice to the Boer cause in hiding these figures. In fact, the press of the world, including most of that of his own country, was in a conspiracy to suppress facts of any kind. They printed articles on crime, and said nothing about the good people of the world, such as farmers (Coetzee, by a coincidence, was also a farmer).

The American press, in particular, came in for strictures. Having eaten the bread of editors, I felt I could not let it all pass. I told him that on the wall of the newsroom in the office of a great American tabloid was a picture of a king-sized moron. This is a blown-up print of a drooling, running-nosed, pig-eyed peasant with beetle brow, huge ears, and a twisted, insane smile. Straws protrude from his shaggy locks. Underneath the picture is the legend *Our average reader*. Reporters who get above themselves and start talking about

calculus and the perihelion of Mercury are taken to see this photograph. Luke could not see it. I, too, had been infected with the pseudo-sophistication of the big cities.

My wife pointed out that the life and viewpoint of Boer farmers were not the subjects she wanted to read about, and a juicy murder was worth all the big talk of do-gooders in the place where she worked. Nor, she pointed out, was I in a position to lay down the law about the press, seeing that I read only the sports section, and the country might be at war for all I would ever know. On this note the discussion closed.

* * * *

We arranged to assemble as a team at Upington, on the Orange River, about a thousand miles road-run from the Cape Peninsula. There my wife and I would camp for a few days, getting into the *swing of the back-to-nature movement*. There were the *Aughrabies Falls*, higher than Niagara, to see, the river islands to visit, plenty of game, and, according to one map, and a recent one, "The Lost Valley of Diamonds" in the vicinity. The place sounded promising. The jobs of hiring and provisioning a couple of lorries and half a dozen native porters was left to me.

With the lorries, we could either run straight up to South-west, via Karasburg and Keetmanshoop, and thence west to Luderitz, or, in view of the inevitable suspicions of the diamond police, turn north via Aus, and get on to the desert by the back door. After that, a run along the coastal desert as far as we could go, stopping at or near Walvis Bay and Swakopmund for cleaning up, supplies, and a brief pause. There was no hurry, in any case. Then a run, as far north as we could go, with or without permits, up to Portuguese West. That meant 800 miles of South-west, and probably a fair bit more, taking in a brief trip to the Kaokoveld area and maybe a look at the Brandberg Mountains. Then east from the Etosha by way of the Tsumeb-Abenab-Grootfontein triangle, and right across the northern Kalahari, after a refit on the S.W. side of the border. The total run I estimated at 2500 miles before we hit the Crocodile River and called it a day. If I could, I hoped to see the Caprivi Zipfel, too, and to put my foot in Northern Rhodesia, if only to say we had been.

Although I had a back-pocket full of permits, inoculation certificates, good characters, and so on, I felt sure that when we started off we should, among us, be short of a dozen or so of these documents. There were too many frontiers involved. Each authority had its own bits of paper, and most frontier posts were many leagues from

where we wanted to go, some of them a week's run. There were *ad valorem* taxes on arms at some places, recoverable on exit—but this always entails a lot of packing and unpacking and the noting down of numbers on butts, and so on. The forms, too, are sometimes of a size more suitable for the purser of one of the *Queens* than a patrol leader. There were instruments, difficult to explain in short words. The regulations are always drawn up by people who stay in one place and try to get everyone else to do the same. To fulfil all one's paper obligations on a long trip nowadays one needs an extra fifteen-hundredweight truck.

My wife said, and often repeated on the trip, "The main thing is not to worry, or you'll have your troubles and ulcers, too." I had noticed before that women do not take kindly to organization unless it is of their own contriving. When a huge man stopped at my peculiar-looking packing cases in one loading shed and cried, in outraged tones, "What's this, then?" my wife said, "Our luggage, of course. What does it look like—the gold from Fort Knox?" In theatrical asides she said, "They should be glad we're bringing our money here to spend. It's doing them good, indirectly." This insistence of my wife on the complete normality of our activities brought many officials down from their apoplectic heights. All but one man, employed by South African Railways, who viewed my appearance on every occasion, with the deepest misgivings. His theme was "You can't do this," but he could not get over the patent fact that whenever we met him, we had indeed done it.

In spite of a few arguments, however, officials as a whole in Africa were decent souls, tempering the lunacy of bureaucracy with discretion and common sense. Compared with the officials of Europe and its hodge-podge of frontiers and zones, they were angels of light.

Broadly speaking, we played fair with officialdom. They were fair to us, and we only broke rules when we had to. We would not dream of throwing arms away, as one party did, on learning that guns could be exported from one country but not imported to another. Nor did we make a run of 500 miles to find a frontier post and 500 back, just to get a stamp on some scrap of paper. People who do things like that are suffering from queueitis. The *fait accompli* is the most powerful of all arguments. Once a man is deep into a country, it is for the officials to find him and tell him what he has done wrong. Then he can plead ignorance, a misunderstanding, and poverty, if he has no powerful connections. If these arguments fail a threat of publicity will frighten most bureaucrats, and these considerations are true in every continent. They would work in Russia, if one could only get into the place and speak Russian.

Myers, like most Americans, was very interested in machines and

sometimes his habit of talking about the world as if it were a series of stops on a tight schedule upset his hearers. I once introduced him to a Welshman who had been out in South Africa for two years, and considered himself something of a pioneer. I missed the beginning of their conversation, but heard Myers describing one of his schedules. "Just had time for breakfast, then I got out to the airfield and got the plane for New York. We had breakfast in England, and as I had a week to spare, I thought I would do some of the places I'd read about."

"Wales?"

"Sure. I did them all. England, Scotland, Wales. Changing of the Guard. That place in Mull, is it? where the water makes a noise like music, like a cathedral."

"Did you see Edinburgh?"

"Yes, a kilted regiment marching. That was good."

"What struck you in Wales?"

Myers paused. It was clear that nothing had struck him, but he was polite as ever. "Well, I didn't have much time there, and it was kind of raining all the time. Trouble is I was on my own, with no one to show me places. Then I did France and Rome—I was there for two hours. I'm going back. I didn't like Greece and Turkey and those places. Couldn't meet anyone, do you know, who spoke English? And the menus—can you read 'em? I couldn't. Then I went back and caught this Comet. That's really something. Do you know Khartoum? But of course you will. That place way up north. They showed me up there these two Niles, different levels. Well, they meet. . . ."

The Welshman was a little bewildered by the sudden changes of scene. In an effort to recover ground, he said, "My wife and I did the Continent last time we were there, just before we came away."

"Which continent is that? Oh, you mean Europe. Sure, there's a lot to see there. I'm going to visit every country in the world, and I think there are about three places in Europe I haven't seen yet."

"Places?"

"Countries, you know. I always call them places. They're quite small, most of them. I drove across three of them one afternoon. Anyway, to get back to the Comet, I was up in Johannesburg, so I thought I'd nip over and look at the Rhodesias, and maybe go up this Zambesi. You know it?"

"What struck you about the Rhodesias?"

Myers launched into a technical discussion on railway gauges, airfields, and road surfaces.

The Welshman got in a burst about Swansea's Civic Centre, but Myers was now well away. "Canada and the United States," he

announced, "could supply the rest of the world with everything they want. That country, Canada, is going places. You should have been up in Alberta with me on the new projects. Really on wheels."

"Do you spend all your life wandering about?" asked the other.

"No, but I want to see what's going on everywhere before I go back to the States. Otherwise, I'm in the dark. You agree on that, don't you? You must feel the same in your business?"

The Welshman took me to one side, later, and said, "That Yank must think we're green, all right. All that talk about where he's been."

"But he has. He hasn't told you the half of it."

"All this talk about 'I only had a day here, so I hired a car and had a look at this jungle'—mean to say you believe it?"

The Welshman, whose horizon had been bounded in the old days by the prospect of a football excursion to Paddington, just could not take in the New Order of nations as places in a timetable, and sought refuge in denying its validity. What he did not understand was that Myers would have been shocked if he knew that the Welshman, as a Britisher, had never visited Canada, and knew nothing of the revolutionary changes in Saskatchewan and Alberta since 1949. Myers, brought up on machines, reading space-travel books to while away the time on his Comet trips at 600 miles per hour, thought of Europe as a picturesque slum living on relief from Washington, and looked forward to the day when men would create their own weather as they wanted it. To him any American coal-miner was an aristocrat, beside whom a penniless German baron clicking his heels over a lady's hand was just a bum from Skid Row, or maybe Skid Schloss.

I was glad to find that the English had puzzled him a little, especially some of the accents. He described some lady he had met, accompanying a diplomat, as saying, "Ai thenk ah would prefer ah cup of ah tea, reahly, thenk you."

"Is that what you call a good accent in England?" he asked me.

"Don't ask me," I told him. "I heard a repeat of a broadcast I gave for the BBC, and it shook me."

"You mean your English accent is bad?"

"Terrible," I assured him.

"Then who decided what's good?"

I told him that the English, apparently baffled themselves, had for years accepted the decisions of an anti-English Irish playwright as final, and now that he was dead the situation was, as might be expected, even more chaotic than it had been before.

Coetzee interrupted, "Never mind the way they talk. The thing

that is important, is what do the English mean? They always say one thing and mean another."

Myers said, "But you're English, or British, whatever they call it. On the same side."

Coetzee exploded. "English—me! Not a drop of English blood in my veins," he announced, with pride. "I'm a South African."

"But you are in the British Empire—you're one of them."

"I'm one of nothing. South Africa is a separate country. My ancestors came here, and made a nation out of bush and wilderness. We don't belong to anybody."

"But you've got a British passport when you want to go anywhere."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"You talk just like a Texan," said Myers.

"Texans can't speak Afrikaans."

CHAPTER III

WE SHUDDA STOOD IN BED

Transport and commissariat ; assembly at Upington ; the hottest place in the Union ; tales of treasure ; I go fishing ; into the Veld.

ONE needs plenty of horse-power to get out of sand, and a high clearance is required. The average seven or eight inches of clearance of loaded cars is inadequate. A four-wheel drive high axle job is best. Low pressure tyres are a great help. I studied the records of the Long Range Desert Group in the North African campaign, and these were useful.

Greasing every 500 miles helps, and oil and petrol consumption is in excess of European needs, of course. Distilled water should be taken for the batteries, which require much more topping up than in temperate climates, and a condenser should be fixed to the radiator. A pressure gauge is needed, as over sand pressure rises very quickly, and leads to trouble. A check every two hours is useful.

It is fateful to try and hurry anywhere in desert country, and there must be ample margins for trouble, because trouble is certain, sooner or later.

Short planks are good for getting out of dunes, and overloading is the biggest cause of trouble. Wire netting, so familiar from the army, is not as good as rope. A shovel is, of course, a must. The maximum load figures given for Britain and the States should not be taken as a guide for a sand trek, for obvious reasons.

My wife and I got the tinned food for the journey from the Sikh stores, and we found them reasonable. Both of us are experienced shoppers, and enjoyed this job. It was a treat to get everything we needed, and as many packing cases and cardboard containers as we required.

Lorry hire, petrol, oil and water and spares was handled by Coetzee. An American buyer would have been too obvious a mark, and an Englishman too obvious a novice. We got two six-wheeler Warford chassis jobs, troop carrier bodies, and canvas tops. I worked out an average consumption of $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the gallon on the basis of the records, and this was near enough. I decided on less than half the authorized load for all vehicles over rough country, as this had been the chief cause of casualties in the past. We got mosquito gauze screens for the radiators, oversize low-pressure sand tyres with normal treads, bush guards, wire-screening for front bumpers, and my own idea, the new Gourrock coolers, to be attached to the radiators.

Tentage we had, and a tarpaulin cover proved handy for hauling over sand. The problem of supply was greatly simplified by the nature of the terrain. The lonely wastes were broken at intervals that might have been arranged for our convenience, such as Walvis and Swakop in the middle of the Namib.

When buying any transport accessories, I kept my mouth shut, leaving it to the salesmen to do all the talking. A few wrong words from me, and a sucker punch would come over. Motor trade people are very quick at sizing people up, and there is a lot of difference in the bills paid by a friend of mine wearing a good suit, and by the same man when he has had the chance to don a suit of blue jeans.

When a salesman starts talking fast, staring into the buyer's eyes, it is time to start turning away and giving out with grunts.

Despite all our precautions, I found I had paid too much for mosquito netting. My wife came up with an alibi for me, saying I had got best quality, but we were never sure about this. Apart from that, we were satisfied with our buyings and borrowings.

There was a lot to worry about. Money was going out in streams, and an accident or mechanical defect in the early stages would mean extra wages for porters, unknown delays, and a loss of that very necessary optimism at kick-off time. A week's good run would, I reckoned, breed team-spirit, that much-abused quality so beloved of generals and schoolmasters. I have noticed that it is most talked about when least present. Only two things produce it—a succession of victories or a succession of defeats bravely borne. When Africans are involved it is more important to start off well, as they are easily discouraged, and are subject to involved and unclassified superstitions. Some natives feel that they have let themselves down by taking on any job, and a small mishap might confirm their view that a tribal spirit or their ancestors are taking a dim view of the situation.

Getting porters was not difficult. They could be recruited in the street, if it came to that, anywhere near the shacktowns. I got two Hereros, Jacobus and Martinus, to keep order over the lesser breeds, while Jacobus as foreman knew that if he got out of line Martinus was there to take his place. I got neckbands of tropical hue for the team, remembering the insistence of all teams on totems. During World War II not all the Army Council Instructions and Brigade Orders could stop men adorning their khaki drab. It might be a coloured lanyard here, or a peculiar beret there, or a handkerchief in the left sleeve. There was always something. It is only their bosses who think of men as personnel and "bodies." Each man knows well enough he is unique.

I tried to stage a try-out with instruments, to show how these worked, and the simple drill with running the cable out and watching

my signals. This was at Upington. I have nothing against the inhabitants, but they are nosey. It is well known among motorists that a crowd around a vehicle often means the loss of valuable parts. In Egypt as soon as a motorist leaves his car there are people underneath it with spanners, and small boys on the roof with knives. Leave a car in the street all night, and the wheels have gone by morning. A seasoned Egyptian driver carries as many moorings, shackles, anchors, hooks, whips, and what-have-you as a fair sized Red Sea *dhow*.

We solved the water problem by designing a special 30 gallon tank, carrying jerricans, and using goatskins, an Arab trick from Libya. The goatskins keep water fresh and sweet and cool, but there is a certain amount of evaporation. Water from a ewe goatskin container is unpleasant, as the smell of the goat gets into the first twenty or thirty fillings.

Water should be boiled whenever possible. Apart from insects and airborne particles, the locals may be suffering from all kinds of frightful complaints.

Tea is the best desert drink, and mint tea if the taste is not too much. The great thing is to avoid drinking between the breakfast, noon, and sunset halts. This discipline hardens body and mind, and enables the white man to defeat the desert dweller on his own midden. As the body loses a great deal of moisture during the day in temperatures between 100° and 150°F., it is best to drink a fair amount at night. To drink alcohol in the high heat would be disastrous.

A great number of inoculations is a nuisance before setting out, but they can be obtained free of charge, with a little patience, and they mean enhanced self-confidence on the job.

We took large supplies of drugs, medicines, and first-aid equipment because we have a superstition that whenever we do not have such stores they are needed.

There are frequent accidents to porters and bearers, and the inevitable small burns and cuts that every worker gets in the course of doing the chores. My wife and I also carry on ourselves, at all times, tiny first-aid kits based on Commando and Ranger techniques, but in my opinion an improvement. Governments tend to be on the heavy-handed side in their planning. A variety of miniature equipments takes up little space, and gives extra physical strength for arms and ammunition. The principle to work on in the tropics is every man his own panzer division, with a cruising range of seven days in all directions, come what may.

Doctoring should be carried on with the maximum of gravity, ceremony, and certainty. The witch-doctor triumphs by his prestige as much as by his knowledge. A brusque manner is an advantage. The ignorant are by nature credulous, and if they can be helped by

being imposed upon, every advantage should be taken. I used to watch my grandfather doctoring his crew at sea, years ago, and his methods were magnificent. Lascars, Chinese, Indians, British, Norwegians, Swedes—all had complete faith in him. Only I knew that he spent anxious periods poring over his medical books and dictionaries. On parade he was always certain, and infected the others with his certainty. If equipment had run out, I have no doubt he would have resorted to faith-healing, and the laying on of hands. What is more, he would have obtained results by giving other people some of his own steel-like self-confidence—the profound belief of the Victorian shipmaster that there was no objective in the world he could not reach; no man his spiritual superior. Had my grandfather ever been shipwrecked on a lonely coast, and worshipped thereafter by the inhabitants as a god, I feel sure he would have taken it all as a matter of course, and only to be expected. Nor would there have been much obvious difference in such a life for him after years of unlimited tyranny on the great waters.

* * * *

Having arrived at Upington, my wife thought it necessary for us to see the local sights. The town, 760 miles north of Cape Town, is fairly high up, and it may be the altitude that is to blame, but strange things happen. Being a good jumping-off place for the Kalahari, or South-west Africa, or the more remote Orange River islands and falls, it attracts prospectors and adventurers. About 75 miles away are the Great Aughrabies Falls, or King George's Falls, as some people have tried to rechristen them. These falls are 480 feet high, and there is an additional plunge of 120 feet or more to the Orange, so that in flood time the spectacle must be worth going for. But there was nothing for us, what with the prolonged drought and the discomfort of driving through clouds of dust. My complaint that I could not find the Orange River was not well received. It had dried up to a narrow stream, and although there was a good motor road towards the Falls, the area was depressing. There were big boulders around, spattered with lizards, and rumours of many baboons, snakes and leopards.

The mosquitoes were in such numbers that I grew dispirited. I had never been a waterfall man, and said, "I suppose we'll have to go the Victoria Falls, too?"

"Why not?"

I had not been struck on going up Table Mountain, either, assuming that everyone in Cape Town had been up, and was only restored to good humour when I learned that the majority of the citizens had not. My wife is not one to put up with such false

snobbery and what she calls "longhair ideas." I thought it was the name of the falls that had attracted her—the native name means The Place of the Great Noise—but found out afterwards it was the possibility of finding water opals, opals being her birthday stone.

The river had cut a great cleft through the rock, and the drought had exposed rifts on the bed. The heat was intense over 120°F. but dry. Neither of us suffered ill-effects, but I developed a thirst worthy of the local champion, who could polish off forty bottles of lager a day.

Colonel Scotland, the British intelligence agent who once served in the German army, was well known in this area. Several Britishers around speak English and German with equal facility, and it is sometimes hard to say what a man is.

I had been told about a peculiar lizard, believed to be one of the missing links with prehistoric times, like the coelocanthus fish. I could not remember the name of the lizard, except that it was one of the something-saurus types, and was not enthusiastic, as a previous effort to find one of these fancy reptiles had proved a wash-out. I kept my eye on the pheasant, duck, and rock-pigeon, instead, and we went back to camp with a fair bag, resisting the temptation to stay until sundown, when I understand a big rainbow is formed, but only, I imagine, during the rainy season.

We gave a lift to a farmer who had been putting poison down for hyenas, and complained of the baboons. These were not content to eat up the maize, but damaged as much as possible before they left a field. The farmer believed baboons sometimes carried off little girls from the native huts. They could, he said, count up to three, and had a language of their own. He had watched them stealing fowls and plucking them alive, screaming with laughter. No baboon troop invaded a farm, he added, without posting sentries and they sent a patrol ahead when they were on the move.

I asked if the natives worried about the wild animals that prowled the highlands. "Not them," he said. "If they've been chased by a leopard they kip down and forget all about it in a minute. You or me, we'd have nightmares."

Water was the trouble with the local farmers. The trouble was the snowlessness of the Drakensbergs, which led to a poor flow in the local spring months. The fruit farmers were doing fairly well, though, with their peaches, citrus fruits, and dates.

My wife, still eager to establish records, was insistent on visiting Goodhouse, the hottest place in the Union, where night temperatures run around the one hundred degrees Fahrenheit level. This was because people at home had told her she would not be able to stand the heat. As it turned out, she suffered no discomfort, wearing suitable clothes and protected from blisters by complexion cream,

powder, and lipstick. I came off poorly, with a skinned nose and forehead and a general beetroot colour of exposed parts. Neither of us, however, felt unable to work, as did some of the local natives, who lay about in a kind of trance. On several occasions in Gordonia, as this part of the world is called, I noticed that the Africans felt the heat more than ourselves.

Goodhouse is well away to the west from Aughrabies, and I felt I had had enough of sightseeing. My chief impression was of the need for an irrigation scheme. In some parts of this land there is rain only two or three times in twenty years, but it is surprisingly healthy. All kinds of people who had led very exciting lives survived into the eighties and nineties.

Jacobus, the Herero at our camp, asked one of the other Africans about the great dragon of the bronze cliffs, and was given a circumstantial account. Maybe this is a folk tale surviving from thousands of years ago. Jacobus knew of caves filled with bats, that were themselves infested by some parasite. Even the eagles up the mountain had "things" that lived on them. To the Africans the world was a place where everything preyed on something else. The idea that the strong should not prey on the weak was beyond them.

The treasure stories were still making the rounds, kept alive by some nasty-looking types. One panhandler, who specialised in stopping people in cars, had an involved tale about a precious stone location halfway between Warmbad and Upington, south of Nakob. He was willing to turn over the information for twenty pounds, later reduced to a fiver. When he found there was nothing doing he put what Cockneys call "the mockers" on me, making cabalistic signs with his fingers in the air, no doubt something he had copied from a witch-doctor.

The recurring stories about a lost field of stones in this part of the world may have some foundation, however, as many people have lost their lives in searches, and it is reasonable to think that the early pioneers had something to go on. Several people had stories about a crater or depression hidden by bush into which men had stumbled, in the ostrich country further north, still uninhabited. Another theory, which I did not accept, was that the Aughrabies carried the stones into the Orange and thence to the mouth. My father, who was out here years ago, believed that there were immense diamond deposits to be discovered all the way between the Kimberley fields and South-west Africa, on the grounds that the same geological formation must persist, if only at wide intervals.

The saloons held many old prospectors, with wonderful stories of the old days, of fortunes lost and won, of friendship with men who were now great names in the world, and of men who had landed with greasy coats from Eastern Europe and had gone off in Rolls-Royces.

Like many old men, however, they lived entirely in the past. Nothing that had happened since 1914 seemed to have any validity for them, and they spoke as beings who had visited Valhalla and were now among the pygmies.

I am no fisherman, although I have enjoyed a few efforts, and I generally manage to catch something, like most beginners. The fishermen proper seem to me to make everything difficult. Their equipment costs a good deal, and the welfare of the fish is a paramount consideration. This is no doubt the proper and sporting attitude, but the fish I see, from sharks downwards, adopt the most unsportsmanlike attitudes.

In South America I had got used to the idea of damming streams, using nets, and even dynamite and poison, although I had not, of course, fallen as low as this myself.

Having got as far as Africa, I was encouraged to try for a barbel when I heard there were plenty of them near Upington. I think now that the locals were kidding me along. I should have been warned by the playful habit some of them have, of crushing a visitor's hand in a vice-like grip when they shake hands. The Afrikaners round here think nothing of a broken arm, sending a native runner to get a friend who will fix it. To get a doctor would be to betray oneself a "Jessie," I suppose. These men run to barrel chests, loud rough laughter, and practical jokes. I was a howling joke for a start, as green as grass, red of neck, and brown by name. This kind of simple badinage appeals in the remote spots.

I did not even know what *dop* was. This is the powerful Cape brandy. The farmers delighted in pouring out half a tumbler of it, and watching me choke. Their throats, hardened by metallic dust, are more like plumbing fixtures than human organs.

Anyone, they told me, could catch a barbel. Little fish, they said, and good eating.

I took good care to get well away from these advisers, in case they took it into their heads to watch my efforts. Like a true fisherman, I do not mind displaying a catch, but the preliminaries demand secrecy. Otherwise another of the handymen bigheads will make life a misery. There are thousands of them. They catch nothing themselves, but advise the world, and know just enough about it to make a mess of everyone's tackle.

Borrowing equipment, I was a little puzzled by the treble gut and the huge hooks. Maybe, I thought, the Boers were heavy-handed in everything. The way they slapped me on the back reminded me of carpet-beating. They were just naturally boisterous, I suppose, like heavy-weight boxers who carry electric buzzers in their hands to shock their friends.

Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun, and it is certainly quiet around this time in Africa. Everything was tawny: trees, bush, scrub, veld. It occurred to me that lions were also tawny, but no one had mentioned anything about them being around. Nevertheless, it was a disquieting thought.

We had outspanned beyond the town, and after making some poor-sounding excuses, I set off, carrying a miscellany of junk, and promising to be back well before sundown. To plan a proper fishing trip would be to reveal my lamentable ignorance.

I imagined the welcome I would get when I returned with a goodly catch, and the thrill of cooking fish over the camp fire.

Big spiders ran across the trail. I was glad they bore no resemblance to buttons, having had several warnings about poisonous button spiders. The glare was terrific. Cactus candelabras, prickly pear, and boulders marked the way to the pool I had noticed the day before as a promising place. There was thick bush on the southern side of the trail, and I had been told to listen for rustlings, in case of snakes. I listened. There were dozens of rustlings. If these were snakes there must have been whole colonies of them. Surely they would not be abroad in the heat of the day? Not according to the books. But had the snakes read the books?

I began to feel sticky. The pool seemed much farther away than yesterday. After a mile I remembered I should look up, in case there was anything waiting for me aloft, such as a leopard or python, or similar friend of man. It was embarrassing to think I could have been killed a dozen times already, walking dozily along as if dodging the spivs and "smudge" boys of Oxford Street. There was a foul smell of decaying vegetation, and some dead creatures gave off a smell that is best left at "nameless."

If I took all the precautions I had been told to take, I realized I would not have time to get anywhere. The thing to do was to push along merrily. Just after this I saw a snake. I had no shotgun but tried to sweep my pistol out of my pocket. It had jammed against the lining, and I had to be careful in case I jerked the safety catch and sprayed myself with .32's. By the time I got the pistol out the snake had vanished. I did not even know what it was. Mambas were black and green. What was that? Not a true green. More of a tawny, like everything else in the country. I did not even notice the length. It was long enough, however. African snakes are never on the stumpy side. I cut myself a stick and went on. There were ants everywhere, and I had to look behind every now and again in case something regrettable was following.

As I staggered on, I recalled my wife's theory that the best way to cross Thirstland was the Hollywood way, as she called it. Holly-

wood, she said, would have a fleet of enormous stream-lined trucks, preceded by bulldozers armed with steel shears. The trucks would be air-conditioned, with water jackets, and would contain battery radios and refrigerators. On an armoured truck would be anti-aircraft and rocket guns with which to bombard the clouds if supplies ran short. Food supplies would be parachuted in daily from a B50 overhead, and a force of Bushmen, organized in relays, would pick these up, fanning out on each side of the convoy. At the tail and head of the column or procession would be cinema trucks, to obtain a graphic record of our doings, and to show the team suitable movies during the tropic nights. The radio transmitting van would send out daily reports of our exploits to a fascinated world. Squads of horn-rimmed scientific hornets would move out in V formation after each *skof* to obtain samples of rocks, flora, and fauna.

I sat on a boulder, sweating horribly, contemplating this Abou Ben Adhem vision. Huge insects strutted past in the sand, while others born on the wrong side of the tracks rolled dung balls as big as themselves.

I felt worn out already, and wet all over. It was what the scientists would call a perfect example of maladjustment to one's environment.

I recalled the words of an old friend in London. "People like you are nuts. The only sensible thing you can do, if you have to go, is to get there, have a quick look round, and get back while you're still in one piece." This sounded like Socratic wisdom from where I was sitting.

But as the old soldiers say, "Never let your mother say she raised a jibber." I reached the pool, and tried a cast. I wrapped this round a thornbush, and was pierced by the sharp spines as I disentangled the muddle. The bait seemed far too big—more like the sort of thing that might catch crocodiles. Worms as big as eels and grasshoppers as big as match boxes. "I'll bring the Loch Ness Monster up with this," I said, aloud, laughing. Talking to myself. The tropics were getting me, fast.

The reeds round the pool had the dry, dusty look that was now familiar. I blundered about for half an hour to no purpose. Then I got a bite. Nothing playful, or requiring skill, otherwise I should have been lost. Just a downward drag, as if I had hooked one of those torsos that turn up in the Monday morning editions: *Believed to be the body of a middle-aged female*.

I thought of hippos, when I could not bring whatever it was to the surface. The line ran out, and I wondered what the next step should be, according to Cocker. In Scotland I knew people went out into the river in waders. But I had no intention of getting into any African waterhole, I had heard too much of bilharzia, and there

were too many one-legged Kaffirs about, men who had gone too near the edge.

The catch did not seem to know what to do, either. I could imagine it thinking, "Blinking amachoor on this line." Eventually it broke surface—a big, nasty, flat-headed face, not unlike a slimy cat with its long whiskers. It groaned, and I uttered an Australian oath. A man of greater sensivity would have run all the way home. Talk about going grey-haired in a night! It was the groan that upset me. Did English fish utter? I was too ignorant to know.

I decided it must be a barbel. It was even stupider than its captor. After a series of groans and blood-chilling bellows it surrendered, and I dragged it ashore and well inland, just in case.

It was far bigger than anything I had expected; on a par with the monstrous bait. In the water it had looked bigger than a man, but it looked about half that size on the bank. That was still too big for me. I had no plans for dealing with anything heavy and gross. As it was still grunting I decided the best thing to do was to quieten it. But how to fix it? It was more appropriate for the crew of a whaler than a string and bent-pin man.

As I stood near the fish it gave an ugly roll and regarded me with a vicious eye. If I did not move quickly maybe the barbel would. And something nasty might come out of the bush behind me to dispute ownership. I finished off the barbel by dropping rocks on his head. What next? The barbel looked a little better now it was dead, more like a fish and less like something out of the *War of the Worlds*. The skin was greasy, muddy, and tough, as I found when I hacked off a few slices. He was too big to hump away.

I decided to light a fire and cook a few pieces. It would justify the trip. After a pull from my water-bottle I felt more energetic. Lighting a fire was easy. Too easy. The flames spread with bewildering speed, and a column of smoke (tawny, of course) rose in the blue. There was a fierce crackling in the dry reeds and branches. I got scared, and had visions of setting fire to the whole of Africa on this side of the Orange River. It was more like a blast furnace than a camp fire. Abandoning the whole idea, I made tracks for the way I had come. As a rich South African said, the great thing in life is to know when to cut one's losses.

The fire died down fairly soon, but I did not go back. I had lost my appetite. All I wanted to do was to get back to some enclosed place—the more enclosed the better, where people sat on chairs. Ahead of me, various animals that had been disturbed by the fire darted across the trail. A mongoose, a nasty spitting serval, some bush babies, and a few fast-running Shapes in the Distance.

As I neared our camp, I slowed down, and was breathing steadily

when I saw my wife, looking cool and efficient, opening tins (the natives were poor at this) and presiding over the cooking.

"Get any fish?"

"One big one. But I didn't fancy it much, so I left it. Too big to carry."

"What was it?"

"One of the locals—barbel, I think. Nothing fancy."

"You look as if you'd had a rough time. All dirt and mud. Look at yourself."

"You know what it is in the bush."

"I think I'll go fishing tomorrow."

I recalled the American heavy-weight boxer who was knocked out, after a disputed count, in a big fight. His tiny manager rushed under the ropes, barking "We wuz robbed! We shudda stood in bed!" I could see Africa was going to more complicated than I had expected.

Things got better as the days went by. Coffee boiled in a billy over a wood fire, tinned steak, pancakes, and our own bread. I lived better on the veld than I had done in Europe when the government was looking after me.

The veld by night is quite different from the veld by day, like the ballet where the toys come to life. The African moon and stars are so bright that at first everything seems clear. But the moving shadows and the vague shapes are hard to define. They might be antelope, wild dogs, or big cats. If we kept absolutely still the shadows came to life, and we saw, or guessed, whatever it might be. It was a world of stoppers and listeners.

I experimented with the water from a spruit, putting alum in it to speed precipitation, but the muddy colour survived, and we relied on the supplies we had brought. Thrown back on elemental things, we realized the importance of water, which in cities seems to be there whenever it is wanted. Water was primary. Without it we should be in a hopeless position. After that, food. Then shelter from the wild animals, and weapons for defence and hunting. It was somehow a cheering experience to realize that for all our civilization and education these first things were still first, when one got down to rock bottom. The plumber and the engineer and the farmer were not getting the recognition they deserved, from where we were sitting. The troubles of Europe and the conflicting theories of deskboys and blowhards did not seem to matter so much. We began to see how the Boers got their idea that the best government is that which bothers a man least. On the veld every man is a brother, to be given food and shelter against the dangers of the dark, while the beauties of the heavens and the grandeur of the sunset over the *kopjes* uplift the spirit.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRETHREN OF THE COAST

Solo trip to Luderitz ; the diamond business ; a little Garmusch-in-the-desert ; northward from Aus.

My friend Jim Brand, who lives at Walvis Bay but has done more travelling in the South-west and over the Kalahari than anyone I know, had warned me that I should have to watch my step in Luderitz. Any signs of prospecting or buying activity, and a roof would fall in on me. Brand and I shared a keen interest in professional boxing, and this took us off our main subject of discussion, which was cars, lorries, and driving techniques. He is probably the most skilful driver-mechanic in the entire territory, and to him an engine is a living individual. I followed his advice throughout the trip, and it was as well, for an ounce of experience is better than a pound of maps and handbooks in the lonely areas.

I made a solo trip to Luderitz, leaving the rest of the party near Aus. I had nothing special in mind, except to get the form, and this was interesting.

Diamonds were found here a century ago, but there was nothing as recently as 1902 but a handful of huts, with water sold to visitors at twenty shillings a glass. Today there is a small town, with many signs of its former German ownership. The white desert north and south of the town is marked with the graves of those who died of madness and thirst, mostly prospectors. Strangers are rare, and under a cloud until they state their business, and the shadow of the diamond police lies everywhere. The Bogenfels, a day's run to the south, is said to be in a diamond belt, and surrounded by ancient wrecks, but no one offered to take me, and I was not anxious to push myself forward. I was seized with a passion for anonymity, as to get into any kind of a jam here would create endless complications for all of us.

There were the usual voluble people in the saloons, drinking Cape brandy with Pilsener chasers. Little side-shows were staged by the customers, such as mongoose v. snake and tarantula v. scorpion bouts, with good money changing hands. There were Germans aplenty, but whether home-bred or Africa-bred it was hard to say. I missed the friendly atmosphere of the Union towns.

A man brought me a double drink, and asked me a few probing

questions, such as if I knew much Afrikaans, etc. . . . I could see this was a build-up for something, and thought he might be an I.B.D. investigator, but he was really a stone-seller. He showed me a stone, and asked me what I thought of it. I let him do the talking. "I wondered if you would know a *schlenter*," he said. So this was one of the fakes. He warmed to his subject, and he had an attentive audience. He told me how to tell the stones by touch, and by exposure to ultraviolet light. Then there was the boiling in caustic soda and the cleaning in alcohol. The locals, I suggested, would be able to make any alcohol tests necessary without going to a laboratory. After trying to explain that this was a mild joke I gave it up and bought him a drink. He was (he claimed) the greatest local authority on the whole business of diamonds. The fact that he had no job inside the wire was due to petty jealousy. I gathered that this fanatic, with the interesting shop talk, was one of the many who still hoped to hit the jackpot. He was certainly a trier. He had shot flamingos (I was wondering what the reason was for the piles of corpses on this coast), ostriches, and various other birds, to examine the gizzards. One never knew what might turn up. A blue diamond would do, as these are easy to sell, but a green stone that would keep the emerald colour after cutting would be a sensation. The specialist valuers, he said, were so good that they could not only tell the price of a stone, but the mine it came from. Visitors could not penetrate the wire, sixty miles by fifteen, without permits and guides and examinations, but the big birds wandered in and out at will. The stones were on or near the surface, the topsoil having been removed by the southerly wind, blowing for millions of years. There were fantastic tales of the greenhorns who rushed here in 1927 and again in 1934, when public access was finally refused.

There were, however, many other areas in which to seek. A prospector's licence cost five shillings a month for the whole territory, and as many claims as one wished could be pegged, 200 metres by 100 metres each, for precious stones. All I had to do was to apply to a magistrate, or file an application at Windhoek. Care had to be taken in registering them, and getting the particulars right. A bit of surveying knowledge was worth good money here. I said good-bye, feeling it was a drink well spent, but refused to make a date for the next day. Something told me Luderitz was not for me. There were too many people taking an interest in the visitor. I had become accustomed to the African habit of staring, which is disconcerting to the new boy, but is only a sign of interest and possibly homesickness, but Luderitz citizens did not strike me as all that friendly.

There were bums, gamblers, and poor whites, all with interesting stories to tell, but it seemed best to keep on the move.



Herero woman



In the Namub desert Peggy looks for Gemstones



Valley of leopards

Back at Aus, I told Coetzee, who was very interested in my reconnaissance, and when I said I was sorry I did not get more of the treasure stories that were floating about, he launched into one of his own, which was even more interesting. He dismissed the hopes of the bums and two-bit prospectors as gamblers' dreams, while admitting the possibility of someone turning up another Cullinan. But in Pretoria, a year before, he had dug up something which had some facts and figures to back it up. We sat down to our bacon and beans and coffee, while he gave out. We were ready to pick holes in his story and trip him up, but he was as fascinating as Allan Quatermain, and we christened him Luke of the Bushveld and voted him a drink.

His story, in brief, was that in 1915, when the German forces were retreating from Luderitz and Windhoek towards the unknown northern territories, it was obviously urgent to hide the precious stones from the South African forces. Surrender could not long be delayed. Dr. Seitz, the German Governor-General, was present at Windhoek after the surrender when the metal boxes hidden by the troops were opened and formally handed over to the South African Government. In 1938 the South African Parliament appointed a commission to investigate the claims of rival petitioners who demanded the rewards due to the finders. The petitioners were Captain Lange, a German, Major Leipoldt and Mr. Van Niekerk of Pretoria, and the relict of the late Captain Dettling, of Cape Town. All the men concerned had been associated with the recovery of the treasure. But some interesting facts came out, especially those involving Mr. Peters. I was, and Coetzee admitted he was, enthralled by Mr. Peters.

At the time of the invasion of German South-west Peters was a sergeant in the German army. For an N.C.O. he was on exceedingly good terms with Graf von Zastrow, the Governor's private secretary. As von Zastrow was also a soldier, he and Peters may have served together, of course, at some time. Nevertheless, a private correspondence between the two men seems most unusual. For some reason the Finance Secretary in the German administration was also on friendly terms with Peters. It was also known that a sergeant and six men had left Luderitz with a box of diamonds at the beginning of the war, under orders. It seemed a job for an officer, but there it was.

Hundreds of miles to the north, near the final surrender area, the Union troops searched for the missing diamonds. The natives directed them to a grave, but this proved empty, although it was clear that something had been there and recently removed. A native then "shopped" the Germans, with information about a new site a few

miles outside the town, inside the gaol farm. Here a box of treasure was discovered under a tree. The Hereros, having been treated so savagely by the Germans, took every opportunity to pay them out. Sergeant Peters was again the leading figure in the burying party. But no diamonds, only some gold and silver. After the German forces had given up the fighting, Sergeant Peters, unmoved by considerations of capture and distance, now appeared hundreds of miles further east, making a short run into the Kalahari with pack mules and one Herero native, who could not afterwards be traced.

A large consignment of diamonds was afterwards found at Outjo, near Otjiwarongo, and this was presumed to be the treasure that had been sought for so long. In Major Leipoldt's evidence, however, the statement appeared that he knew Peters had gone into the Thirstland with the diamonds.

Coetzee said this investigation was now considered closed, despite the fairly general opinion that every treasure box had not been found. In his own opinion, a number of rich German farmers who had paid upwards of £20,000 for their farms after 1918, and had been making three to five thousand a year ever since, surrounded by large retinues, would have difficulty in explaining the origins of their wealth.

Coetzee thought it might be worth while to reopen the whole business, but I decided against it. I pointed out that whatever Mr. Peters had done, he had been able to produce orders to justify his actions. If he, or any other Germans, had failed to reveal the hiding places of treasure, that was not surprising, in view of the state of the war in 1915. And when the war ended, no doubt the people concerned had bided their time before lifting the caches, when a suitable opportunity occurred. The money would be spent by now, and we would not claim a title by any stretch of imagination. At best, we might recover something for the government. The government had not paid out the rewards twenty-three years after the last job. So where did we come in? In Europe there had been at least twenty attempts to recover the Dongo treasure stolen in 1945, but nothing had come to light, and investigations brought in so many well-placed people that the job became unhealthy.

We went to sleep, dreaming of hidden millions, but next morning turned to the everyday jobs without a word of the campfire debates. It was as well that no flamingos or ostriches came around, or our thoughts might have reverted.

* * * *

We were a happy family. We had our own specialities, and were thus not in conflict, working together as well as could be imagined.

Myers could tell us about his experiences in the States, and the contrasts with the Old World. Coetzee had his own philosophy of the importance of the primary producer, and the transient nature of all else. My wife was determined to maintain the normality of civilized life no matter how hysterical the background, and applied herself to her cosmetic box every night with the unruffled calm of a Londoner returned from a visit to the theatre. My own refusal to be optimistic about anything, and insistence on pointing out the dark side of any new situation, was amusing to my companions.

Myers had some stories that might be worth repeating, as they amused us. One was about his grandfather, who had worked for Tesla, the American inventor, who refused the Nobel Prize after inventing the polyphase alternating current system.

Tesla, a most brilliant hermit-like creature, was to the man in the street the mad inventor of the comic strips, capable of standing for hours, like a sleeping horse, in his room while he pursued a new train of thought. On one occasion Myers the elder was associated with a laboratory job on West Broadway with Tesla. This was an experiment in the nature of sustained vibration, still a little-explored field, and for a good reason. Tesla could tune electrical circuits so that the electricity vibrated in resonance with its own circuit. He attached a small oscillator to an iron stanchion in the laboratory. The oscillator built up a series of higher and higher frequencies. What happened was that, as the supporting stanchion transmitted the vibrations through other columns to the ground and thence to the sandy subsoil, the vibrations were spread far and wide to distant objects with which they were in resonance. Buildings all over the district began to shake. Windows fell out, and the walls in the police station began to shake, while panic-stricken citizens poured out into the streets. Earthquakes had been in the news at the time, and most people thought this was a tremor, but to make sure the police flying squad of the time dashed round to Tesla's offices, howling with rage when they found out the culprit.

It was just as well that the police chief was a man with a scientific turn of mind, as the experimenters might have been faced with a bill for damages on a cosmic scale. The New York City administration saw to it that no further trials with oscillators were made inside their limits, although Myers the elder claimed that Tesla had a $2\frac{1}{2}$ h.p. motor oscillator capable of shaking down Wall Street. It was this same inventor who created artificial lightning storms in Colorado long before the rainmakers got busy, and who once generated a potential of over 100,000,000 volts. Perhaps it is just as well that the United States government seized all Tesla's papers on his death. In the wrong hands some of his ideas about automata and telegéo-

dynamic oscillators and the manufacture of so-called psychic phenomena would create widespread panic. If Orson Welles could cause an evacuation of cities with one broadcast, what could a Tesla—an Edison Medal winner—do?

* * * *

Aus is a little Garmisch-in-the-desert, studded with German-style chalets. It was at one time a German military post, and there is good Windhoek beer to be had—rightly famous, and quite unlike the dreadful brews of English chemists. H. G. Wells once said we should send a few men over to Rothenburg and Munich to learn the art of brewing, men who would leave the laboratories out of it, for a change. Certainly our ancestors were never reared on the stuff retailed today. It takes six years to make a brewer in Germany, but a man can take a B.Sc. in chemistry in half the time. This is called progress.

Aus lives on the mutton sent to feed the diamond workers and guards at Luderitz. There are lions and leopards and ostriches just outside the place, and they were among the discouragements that the gold-seekers found during the first world war. A few men found "colour," but nobody made anything. There were no earthquakes while we were there, but I heard that a tremble or two was common. Not much is known about the geology of the region, but it must be worth studying. Luderitz is raised up on a shelf above the diamond fields, where the gems are on the surface or at most a few yards down, and Aus is quite a few thousand feet up. Then it is not a very long journey to the radio-active hot springs, where people go for rheumatic disorders in the winter, May to August. During the local summer, November to January, the springs dry up and it is so hot that not even the hardened Boer farmers can stand it. We were told of a gang of two hundred natives, fed up with the diamond fields, who had struck out south for the Orange across the desert. About half of them got through. There was some story about the *City of Baroda*, wrecked off the coast a few years before, but I have forgotten it, and about a man caught just inside the *Sperrgebiet* who had paid his £500 fine in cash and thus avoided the usual penalty of a year's imprisonment for trespassers.

Myers had a run to Keetmanshoop, and brought back no good reports. Most people, he said, were neurotic, and drank some vile concoction of beer and berry juice. One man even busied himself with tomato juice and gin. There was no explanation of Keetmanshoop's addiction to scarlet drinks. It was just one of those things.

We pressed on north towards the desert coast, while the natives

ate candy that my wife had bought in large quantities. We talked over buying skins at the usual price—an ounce of tobacco a skin—from wanderers we might find, but after discussing the pros and cons decided against it, mainly because we did not have a hundredweight sack of salt, and that might be needed. Coetzee knew someone who made a living out of buying skins from the Kaffirs and Bushmen, and there was a big demand in Windhoek, which attracts buyers from all over the world, but the business sounded too complicated. There were rumours about men who killed bushmen for their bones, sold to museums, and although I think this is a fable, not everyone shared that point of view. Apparently in the old days scientists in Central Europe employed a few Burke and Hare boys, with no questions asked, a kind of Murder, Inc. of the Kalahari. When I said this could not happen nowadays I was reminded of the Belsen and Auschwitz experiments.

Round the camp fire that night my wife was laying down the law when I returned from cleaning the guns. Coetzee had been saying that whatever happened in the future no one would be able to take this experience away from us. Rich or poor, we would be able to brag that we had had our little moment of individual enterprise, as free as springbok. My wife said, "I can imagine all of you, at sixty, boring some poor woman to death with the same old record. At sixty, men always talk about what they did thirty years earlier. It is as if nothing had happened in the years between." We thought for a time, and agreed that all our elderly acquaintances, or nearly all, played the same old records. We, of course, would be different.

"Life can begin at forty for a woman," said my wife, "if she has married young. The children are fairly grown up by then, and she can acquire new interests."

Myers said, "That's what happens in the States. They join the clubs and start running everything."

Coetzee took a poor view of all this. "A home is where a woman should find her happiness."

My wife said, "The three K's again, *Kuche, Kinder und Kirche*. I wonder what the *Voortrekker's* wives thought about progress?" Coetzee smiled. "I can tell you what President Kruger's wife said when he came to bed in pyjamas for the first time—'What's the matter with you? Take those things off and come to bed in your shirt and trousers like a good Christian!'"

"I'd have liked Kruger," said my wife, "he believed in young people."

"That's true," said Coetzee. "Smuts was only twenty-nine when he was the Republic's Attorney-General. In those days you had to grow a beard and try to walk slowly, like an old man."

"My grandfather did that," I recalled, "otherwise he'd never have got a command. That's how the Victorians seemed so old to us—they had to pretend to be solemn and pompous to get ahead. But really they were far bigger adventurers and rascals than we've seen for fifty years."

"The biggest rascal we ever had round these parts was George Gordon-Lennox, an Englishman or a Scotsman, what's the difference?" asked Coetzee.

"The Scots are better educated," I pointed out.

"This one was educated, all right. He set himself up as the local Ned Kelly, and . . ."

"Who's Ned Kelly?" asked Myers.

After we had explained, Coetzee went on: "Gordon-Lennox knew there was a big reward out for him. He met a poor man and had nothing to give him, so he made the poor man take him in and claim the reward. Then he broke out. Another time he was being taken to Upington by a trooper, but stuck him up with his own gun, took the trooper in as himself, claiming another reward. The trooper tried to explain, but no one would believe him, and he was shoved in the cells. Trouble was nobody had a photograph at the time, to say who was who."

CHAPTER V

THE DUNES OF TREASURE

*In the Namib desert ; a few small prizes ; water-traces ; Walvis
spells civilization.*

ONCE beyond Namaqualand, the doubts and uncertainties of the temperate zones seem to vanish. The brown dunes stretch north from the Orange River, rich in diamonds and other precious stones. The piratical days of illicit diamond buying have gone, talking in broad terms, but the flavour survives. And the diamonds. The place is loaded with them. Let no one think that the stories are exaggerated. The stories so far told are only the news in brief terms in a serial that could run a year.

The difference today is that the dunes are so well guarded and patrolled that lone raiders would not get very far. If people are seen too frequently in the vicinity of the diamond desert the diamond detectives issue a formal warning. Even the chiefs of the industry are X-rayed on leaving the fields. A lone white man sticks out in this area like an old Etonian in the Moscow Metal Combine. A few hardy adventurers have arrived from abroad with big ideas, but their activities are so obvious that it is possible to give them an account of their records and plans, just as if a network of F.B.I. agents had been assigned to them. The best camouflage is the pretence of some other objective, and this could have only a limited success.

At the time of the first strike the take averaged £25,000 in value every week, and millions of pounds worth have been found since. This is nothing to what is left. The resources are fantastic. If they were dumped on the world markets prices would tumble, so production is limited by effective demand.

Flyers have gone in, hoping to locate a handful of gems, often found near the surface along the dunes. But the difficulties of the country have killed them. The lack of water, the wild dogs that attack in packs, the strand wolves, the lions further up that go down to the sea to catch crabs—I know it sounds incredible, but it is well known in West Africa—whole prides at a time. There are huge dogs that go down to the coast to snatch fish from the sea. There are the crabs, huge, aggressive creatures, that come ashore in swarms at night.

The sunsets were magnificent, and the nights under the stars

silent, quite different from the game areas. The wild life of the Namib keeps quiet, which makes it all the more shocking when it has to be faced.

I was told about I.D.B. Smith, who hid ten thousand dollars worth of diamonds in his hotel room, but never saw them again. There was the huge parcel of diamonds stolen from the train headed for the south. There was Dr. Reuning, the German geologist, who averaged £30,000 a week for five weeks. There was the labourer who found enough diamonds to fill a coal scuttle under a rock—total value half a million sterling. In every town up here—and such towns they are, some of them, a handful of shacks and corrugated iron shanties—there are men today who “just missed the boat.” They sold out too quickly, or just missed the pay dirt area, or had to sell a claim through lack of capital.

Then there is the story of the bottle of diamonds, stolen by a worker on the fields, and hidden by being cemented to a rock on the lonely coast, just before the ban went up. That bottle is still there.

The *Sperrgebiet*, as the forbidden area is popularly called, is the scene of many rough maps that prospectors say will lead the buyers to fortune. But how can one tell which of these maps is the right one? The stories could not commend themselves to me as novelties, as just before I left England I was told a circumstantial tale of a vast treasure in South America, easily handled, out of which I was to get ten per cent and all expenses paid for co-operation. In the last two years I have been told a score of possible treasure stories, meaning that there is enough evidence available to make them worth investigation. As for dozens of others I have heard, they were either invented by strange characters from the backblocks trying to drum up drinks or a hand-out, or it was impossible to say either way what there was in it. But it is a mistake to think that treasures are myths and legends. In our own time one man has earned himself several million pounds out of such an idea, since 1940. And how many others have taken their loot quietly to the black markets of Europe, disposed of it at a reasonable figure, and then quit the game for good, retiring to the delights of Rio and the Californian coast? The pressure to brag, or at least to talk about such exploits is tremendous, but some men can resist it, compensating themselves with fleshpot pleasures, and a fortune, for the fame or notoriety that might be theirs.

Everyone who has been on the Namib Desert talks about its loneliness. The wind on the coast is either burning hot or fearfully cold. There is no life to be seen for miles and miles. The coast seems to go on without end, and the sand dunes look as if no one had ever set foot on them. Looking inland the sandy wastes stretch to the mist

on the horizon. There are whales off the coast, and strange fish. The waters offshore heave up every now and again as if a mud volcano were active out there. There are red duststorms which turn the air red, turning everything into, not a glorious, but a ghastly technicolour.

I had hoped to come across an old wreck lost in the dunes, but nothing is marked. The dunes drift at a rate of five yards a year, so some of the big ships cast here may be fifty fathoms down in sand by now, or more. Off Conception Bay I could still make out old wrecks in the dunes. Far inland, these steamers used to be handy headquarters for the diamond prospectors at one time. They are not all small craft, either. The *Cawdor Castle*, wrecked in 1925, was a big Union Castle ship from Southampton. The wreck of an old slaving vessel was preserved by the sand and there is a very common story about the *Great Mogul*. This ship, carrying a million pounds worth of gold and rubies from India in Clive's day, was lost off the Namib. I was told that a search of the records of the East India Company would reveal the supposed plan of the area in which the treasure was buried after the wreck, by a few survivors, but that this plan is incorrect. The treasure is still on the coast. Those who buried it never returned.

Substance is lent to this story by the finding of gold coins of the period and area at Hottentot Bay, and the continual recovery of oak timbers and ornaments from the sands by the natives combing for wood.

Many wrecks are sunk so far in the sand that a large party of workers would be needed, and their terror of the nights in the Namib, the lack of transport and roads, and no water have prevented any serious effort. Nor could blasting be tried to wreck the huge dunes. Dynamite is useless in this sand.

One policeman in the area, having heard that Bushman children had been seen playing with diamonds as big as six carats, went out into the Namib to investigate. He never returned. The wild dogs and hyenas ate him. Another officer had been shot at with the poisoned arrows. Altogether, the prospects were not inviting, especially when the first dig disclosed human bones. What with the screaming of the wind, the sandstorm blowing up and the general misery of the place, and the uncertainty regarding leopard spoor and mad dogs weighing a hundredweight apiece, this was a night to be remembered. Definitely not the place for a Butlin holiday camp.

The night was terrifyingly black, and damp with the clouds that come inland at sundown. The Africans were upset, and it was necessary to calm them. We had outspanned in the shelter of a

high dune, to protect us against the screaming wind, and there was something ghastly about the whole area. To help improve general confidence, I walked about calmly, and even did a bit of scraping about in the sand with my dynamo torch, but my wife was wary of snakes, and discouraged such efforts. Nevertheless, it was an uneasy team that settled down for the night.

Next day I carried on with instrument observations, and kept everyone busy, but there was much less talk than usual. That night I felt ill, and had a wretched time. During the day the air had seemed to be impregnated with iodine, and I had considered this beneficial. Such vast quantities of seaweed lay inshore that everything seemed saturated with the smell. The third day was a mournful one, and people commented on my looking older—I had visions of a bent creature looking a hundred years old emerging at Walvis. My attempts at cheerfulness were not appreciated, and deceived no one. If Myers had suddenly announced the discovery of King Solomon's Mines I doubt if I could have raised a cheer. I dosed myself with drugs from the medicine chest when no one was about, and somehow raised enough strength to move about, cutting down our scheduled advance to fit in with my bodily needs. It was no longer difficult to imagine men dying on a sixty miles journey from the coast to the vegetation belt.

The heat was not as great as I had expected. The thermometer sometimes showed us figures that seemed improbable, no doubt because of our proximity to the sea. While I felt ill, it seemed that everyone else was in especially rude health. This may be a distortion due to sickness. I had a strong feeling that I must not let the Africans realize my weakness, as for some reason they would lose confidence. As the days passed, I got acclimatized to some extent, but was far below par both mentally and physically. Peggy now proved herself a rock on which to lean, and other people did not suspect how ill I really was. Alone, I should have been compelled to halt the convoy or hand over to someone else. As it was, we maintained our schedules, less a day or two. The logistics of such an expedition are simple enough, and I always allow a good margin for error, in any case.

We came across the spoor of small game, but there was no sign of the tiny leopard that is said to inhabit the desert—about the size of a domestic cat. I think this must be a legend. A stray serval might have started it. My own belief is that there are no leopards on the coast. They always favour rocky ground, and deep fissures between rocks, like their cousins the pumas. Leopards use trees as cover and as look-outs, and there are no trees in the Namib.

My wife found a few amethysts in one of the dunes, and this en-

couraged us to scrape about, but we found little else, except a few pieces of semi-precious stones further north. These little prizes did a good deal for us in raising hopes, as they represented real gains. I told my wife to have a ring made from the beryl we found, but she was more interested in the amethyst, which had a nice colour. It was interesting to see how we all behaved according to the story books, once stones had been discovered. Science was forgotten, and we began to shout and run about, working madly, until we realized what undisciplined figures we made. Beneath every civilized man there must be a hunter, and not far beneath, either. I recalled an experience in the Spanish Civil War when we went without food for a couple of days, and went back three centuries in behaviour, intellectuals and all, with George Orwell trying to keep the lamp lighted.

There were no whales on the coast, although they sometimes throw themselves up here, a hundred at a time. Yet the season was right. Twenty-five years earlier a school of whales threw themselves ashore in Scotland on just such a mass suicide, which cannot be explained.

The American whalers from New Bedford came here at one time, and surprised the English adventurers by their bold language to their own and the English captains. The American idea of democracy in action had surprised the English. On the other hand the American practice of putting to sea without experienced navigators had shocked the limejuicers. It was well known that some American ships had no one aboard capable of taking a night sight. The officers had to ask their way down the African coast from island to island. When I told Myers about this he told me a story of Coetzee's about the reason for the famous defence of Mafeking. Mafeking, he said, had to be defended at all costs by order of the British War Office, which was under the impression that the town was a key place for unloading stores on the African coast. I dismissed this as an invention of the Boer propagandists. Unfortunately it has been given a good deal of substance since by Viscountess Milner, who is in a position to know, seeing she was staying at Groote Schuur as a guest of Rhodes at the time!

☞ We did not run into the camel police, although I had earmarked some beer for the troopers. I felt sorry for anyone who had to ride camels, remembering my own experiences with these creatures. They may have been busy with the carrier-pigeon poachers. There were rumours that individuals with motor-cycles were cruising around, flying out their fids. There was a story about a man who had found a diamond inside the fields, and had driven it over the wire inside a golf ball while practising shots with the local worthies,

but it seemed unlikely that the poachers could include a Cotton or a Ben Hogan among their members!

Still, anything could happen. Captain Parker of the *Kirkwood* had found a dead man under a pile of guano, and Mrs. De Roos had been given a bottle of pebbles at her back door by a Kaffir she helped. She threw the bottle in the sea, after keeping it for years, when she caught the coastal boat down to the Cape. But years afterwards that very same bottle of pebbles was washed ashore inside the *Sperrgebiet*, and the pebbles proved to be uncut diamonds, of the usual top rate—Namaqualand stones are 75 per cent high quality.

On our route there was supposed to be a lost field—the little Pomona. It certainly existed in the days of the German occupation. Where is it?

Bob told us about the volcano area at Brukkaros, where the American scientists worked for years. General Botha's cousin was the first man to have a go at the place, according to Luke, who said the place was now deserted, apart from the baboons. This crater is near the dry bed of the Fish River, and I understand the observations that were financed by U.S. Universities had something to do with the peculiar geological formations of the zone. There is no one there today, and the observers must have had a pretty tough time during their stay.

One digger further south had been most unfortunate. He had secreted some diamonds in his mouth organ, and sent this back to his wife by post for repairs, the authorities being in full approval on the grounds of improving morale. The trouble was that his wife threw away the pebbles inside the mouth-organ, and after having it looked over by a repair-man, sent it back to her husband, expecting congratulations.

Where we stood on the third day the *Rosalind* and *Ocean King* had gone aground, but there was no sign of any ship.

* * * *

The journey up to Conception Bay remains in my memory as a sequence of yellow dunes, twenty to fifty feet high. There was the checking of the instruments, the running out of cable, the misunderstandings over signals until we got into the swing of things, the drawing of rough maps, and the merciful rest periods with drinks. None of us ate very much. Consumption of rations was far below indent. My first experience of the coast sand was duplicated a hundred times. Poisonous smells, just after we had thrown ourselves down to say, "This is the life," and dead pilchards by the score, with flamingos scampering in the distance. In the clear desert air, by the sea, we should have been one hundred per cent

fit. Instead of that, we were often below par, irritable, and uneasy. Peggy stood up to it best. I wondered if we were suffering from some kind of poisoning from ultra-violet rays. The irritability might have been due to the lack of shade, which was shocking to city-dwellers.

Conscious of our weakness, of which we rarely spoke, we tried to make up for our dullness during the day by animated talk at night. We discussed the possibility of finding some kind of fish or fish skeleton that might create a furore in the scientific world. There was a good deal of this in the air. Professor Smith had made headline news with his coelocanth, and other professors, not to be outdone, came up with ape-men, missing links, and shell-fish millions of years old. I had to explain to my colleagues that as far as biology was concerned I was strictly tapioca above the ears.

There are, I understand, men who can deduce a whole dinosaur from a fragment of tooth, and the religion of an ancient race from objects found in an ash-dump, but a certain amount of faith is necessary to accept many of their conclusions. Tom Johnston, the former Secretary of State for Scotland, with the help of a few minions, once buried a stone slab bearing a Roman inscription about Antoninus Pius that he had devised, on a building site, and stood back to watch the fun, which was considerable.

Living close together on a mobile column is an even quicker method of getting acquainted than deck-chair neighbourliness on shipboard. We had first to dispel a number of illusions. Luke, for instance, knowing that I had served a hitch at Oxford, was under the impression that I must have taken part in a number of orgies, his conception of student life there being derived from books written a long time ago. I hastened to dispel the belief that undergraduates were still filthy with the stuff, flying over to Paris every week-end, and gaily ordering caviare, blue trout, and Montrachet at the George or Mitre.

Most of the students of today, I told him, had proletarian backgrounds authentic enough to satisfy the labour director of the Chelyabinsk Ball-Bearings Syndicate, and many of them dined at a table in the aptly-named British Restaurant. Luke was very disappointed. He had had pleasant visions of blonde sirens draped across tiger-skins on the settees of L.M.H. and Somerville, reading notes on deckle-edged paper from the heirs to dukedoms.

It was true, I told him, that I had been present at two parties that were later described as orgies in the Scottish press, but all I had noticed was the poor quality of the sherry and the conversation. Maybe the orgies had followed, or even been contingent upon my departure, but my own prosaic theory was that an impoverished

baron, awaiting his turn at the ancestral tea-urn, was earning a sharp half-guinea by writing a hot paragraph.

Luke said little, but I could see he thought I might have been out of "the swim," as he called it, and immersed in the yellow books exposing everything that were so widely read at the time, instead of cultivating a few purple flowers. Talking of this, Bob gave us a few reminiscences from his own student days, which had been on a similar Philistine level.

Luke seemed to think that Oxford graduates, having dabbled in the classics for a year or two, drifted about the world. A winter at Luxor, an Adriatic cruise in the family yacht, débutante dances in London, a shoot in Scotland. He must have been a devoted admirer of Robert Hichens. The truth was, I told him, that most of my friends of the old days were now worried-looking business and professional men. Luxor was unthinkable and even unfashionable, the yachts had been sold to defray death-duties, the dances were reserved for Guardsmen with bowler-hats and rolled umbrellas, and the shoots in Scotland were patriotically reserved for Americans.

Luke then explained how wrong we were in our conception of the Afrikaner farmer as a survival from some prehistoric and certainly much ruder age. His friends, he claimed, were keen students of erosion and plant-growth problems. They were in correspondence with soil scientists in experimental stations all over the world. They themselves were bold innovators with stock-raising problems. *Time*, *Life*, and even the *New Statesman* could be found on their sideboards, as well as the Afrikaans and English language periodicals. The Afrikaner had a philosophy of his own, as good as anything that had come out of Europe, and that was to build a nation of primary producers that would spread throughout southern Africa, composed of men and women devoted to good living, Christian thinking, hospitality, and the supremacy of the paternal white pioneer, drawn from all lands of Europe. Europe, said Luke, was like North America, fascinated by death and moral decline. The literature of the times proved it. The true Afrikaner was, on the contrary, optimistic, ready to shoulder responsibility, eager for adventure. The English, he added, were once upon a time a bit like this, but the best of them had been killed off in two world wars, and all that was left was a miserable collection of queue-standers, obsessed with a security that had never existed and never could exist on earth. The problem of government was as simple today as it had ever been. Confronted with a choice, a man must always select that government whose officials bothered him least. Knowing that, any government would be scared to send out people who might interfere anywhere with the sovereign rights of the individual.

Stunned by this broadside, Bob and I tried to imagine ourselves trying to stand on our individual rights in our own countries. The last time I did it was in the army, when I complained to the orderly officer that the food was a disgrace. Looking round for the supporters who had promised to back me up, all I found was a row of heads bowed over their plates.

Bob said that he thought there was something in Luke's point of view, but the world had shrunk so much that it was no longer possible to live alone and like it. As an American, he believed that competition between nations was as dead as prohibition. The United States had out-produced the rest of the globe, and that was that. It was now a question of organizing the distribution of surpluses, without calling them gifts, so that people would get accustomed to being looked after. They had already proved conclusively that they were unable to look after themselves, except in the matter of hot air. A man was now a world-citizen, like it or not, and the nearer he got to the idea, the better he would be, financially and morally, because he would not then feel so much out of step with what was going on.

Peggy intervened in this debate to ask if one of the honourable members would be good enough to fix the Primus, or there would be a hitch in the distribution of our surplus. "Go on, Bob," said Luke, "you're always bragging about technical superiority. Let's see what you can do." But for once the American Way did not work, and Peggy fixed things herself, as usual.

Luke had a harmonica, and this was the total of our musical instruments. I had looked longingly at a piano-accordion before setting out, thinking this trip would be a suitable occasion on which to practise, but there was a singular absence of enthusiasm from the others. Peggy said, "You'll never be the life and soul of the party. Not the type." Nor was my singing in demand, and I gave up, easily discouraged and suffering from that accursed self-consciousness that troubles the English until they are in the seventies or on the hills.

The Africans made up for our silence whenever they felt like it, as happy as the prancing coons at the Jo'burg New Year parade. We used to look at them, singing in harmony and beating time on old tins, and wonder why we could not enjoy ourselves in this primitive, child-like way, getting the full benefit out of every waking hour.

As we went north, there was a tendency among all of us to shed clothes. It looked as if we would be all down to hide aprons by the time we reached the Kunene. Peggy's skin was now a becoming orange, Luke's a shade darker, while Bob and I were in the scarlet runner class.

Luke pulled me up once when I was being technical. "There are diamonds," I had said, "from Latitude 28°-30° South all the way up to Conception Bay, 24° South."

"What are you talking about?" asked Luke. "Talk English, man. You sound like the stationmaster at De Aar reading off the timetable. Is he always like this?" he asked Peggy.

"It bolsters his ego," said Peggy. "Aboard a ship he won't let me say downstairs or upstairs, or the sharp end. There are so many abafis and abeams and companions and noon sights in his talk that I don't understand a word."

"Unappreciated I may be," I pointed out, "but when I won the sweep on the day's run I didn't notice any critical comments. Supposing we were lost in this desert, you'd all be whining round me to find out where we were and which way to go."

"Not me," said Luke. "I'd head north, and we're about a hundred and fifty miles south of Walvis. Follow the sea and you can't go wrong."

"Those bones you found this morning," said Bob, "they belonged to the last man who said you can't go wrong. When I was in England, every time I asked anyone the way, he always gave me about twenty turns, right, left and centre, and finished off 'You can't go wrong.' O brother, but how I did."

Our water-divining work was not going as well as we had anticipated. There were indications of underground water on our ohmmeter at several points due west of the dried-up bed of the Kuiseb river, and these would repay further survey, but there had been no shattering surprises. The instruments stood up to the heat and rough handling, and we were becoming more expert in their handling, although at best this would have shocked a proper survey team.

As the days went by we slowly recovered our strength, and started to clean our plates again. All of us, I think, felt that we could not lose face by being ill when Peggy was so much on her toes.

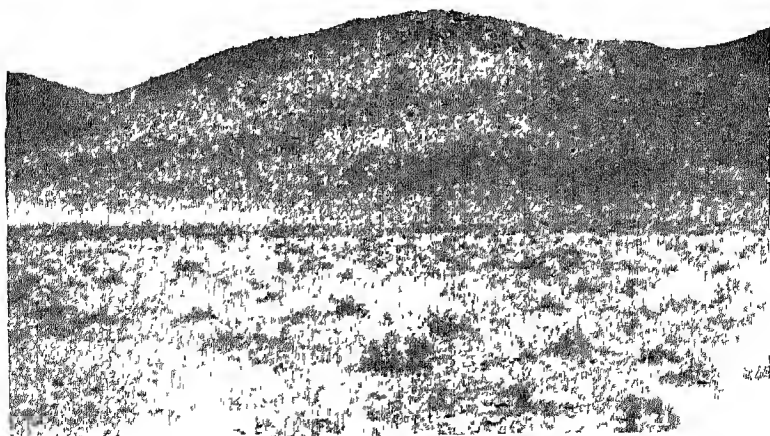
The nights were cold, and we used the sleeping bags, first painting our faces with insect-repellent. Sometimes there was not a sound in the inky darkness, only the dull booming of the sea. Other nights we all had a feeling of being watched. Possibly a pack of wild dogs was near, behind a dune. Occasionally we saw a scout dog from the pack on a distant sandhill, and more rarely a group, but they vanished as soon as observed. They were quite distinctive, with their circular, projecting ears. Not all of the same breed, however, as some looked like wolves and others like hynas. I doubt if these wild dogs would attack a man unless he were on the point of collapse, but they would be formidable enemies. It was hard to see what they lived on, apart from the gazelles and fish and the desert rodents. There may



Peggy scrambles up a kopje



A "Recce" in the Kaokoveld



Kaokoveld scene



"It's cooler up here!"

be *strandlopers* (beach bushmen) in these parts, but we saw nothing of them, and no footprints. The camel police further south and north of Cape Cross believe they exist, and they should know, but they are masters at keeping out of sight, like their Kalahari brothers. The dunes hid sounds, very effectively, and it was a problem how to outspan in the shelter of a dune, on the northern side, and avoid surprise from possible intruders who could approach from the south under the lee of the slope. To camp on the crests would mean exposure to the moaning wind, and considerable discomfort. I rigged a trip line between two sticks so that a disturbance would release the clapper of a brass bell we had with us, and this proved a useful insurance. Only once did we hear the bell, which clanged joyously across the sand, loud enough to awaken the Africans from their heavy slumbers. This bell had a history, being the poop bell of the *Cutty Sark*, the famous clipper that set up records in the brave days of sail. I had obtained it when the *Cutty Sark* was at Falmouth, before she went to London river to become a kind of national shrine.

The bell was in surroundings that were not unworthy of her past, for there had been well-known ships and shipmasters on this coast. In the days of the pirates the King's Pardon was published to all adventurers on and off this coast guilty of piracies between the Cape of Good Hope and Socotra, who surrendered before April 1st, 1699. William Kidd and Young Avery were excepted by special mention. A lot of pirates came in to recover their citizenship before April 1st, as leery as ever. Kidd was overrated, in my opinion, and not in the same class as Henry Morgan. The ablest men made their way back to Britain under another name, or settled down in the Americas, where few questions were asked, with enough gold and jewels to last them their short and merry lives.

Bob told us that the American brig *Massachusetts* (600 tons, ex Boston) was off here in 1790, with one of his ancestors aboard. This must have been one of the first merchantmen of the infant republic, and how badly-off they were for seamen in those days can be seen from the story that there was no chronometer aboard, and the captain, hoping to get a fix off the Cape Verdes, missed the islands by a distance worthy of a soldier.

Strangely enough, my own great-great-great-great-grandfather was at this time commanding a brig out of Rothesay in this trade, and made enough out of it to buy a few ships. It was heartening to think that both men might have set foot on these shores. Such speculations were not pleasing to Luke, who liked to think of the States as something much rawer and brash than the old Transvaal Republic.

We had some books with us, and they were very welcome, as on previous expeditions. There is always grumbling about them at

loading time, but as with canned fruit-juice, there are congratulations to some. One of the books was about Aleister Crowley and his efforts to raise the devil in the sands of North Africa. Peggy read extracts aloud, which put us into convulsions, and excited the natives, who chattered and chuckled to see us in such good spirits.

Bob, experimental as ever, was all for tracing a few pentacles and pentagrams on the sand, and seeing what kind of familiars we could conjure up, but I sent him behind a dune in case he hit on the right formula and the Africans bolted.

Bob returned from his devil-raising efforts, looking hot and bothered. He viewed the grinning faces before him without enthusiasm, and accused us of cowardice and lack of sportmanship. "Supposing I had raised something, and been imprisoned inside the figure?"

"We'd have looked for you after supper," said Luke.

"After supper. I like that."

I consoled Bob by telling him he should have waited until All Hallows, apparently Founders' Day in the trade.

Devil-raising is not all it is cracked up to be. I once lived in the street in which Aleister Crowley had had a house, and made enquiries of the neighbours. But Londoners know little of the people next door. Nobody had observed any seismic disturbances, and the entrance of witches and warlocks had passed without notice. An artist in the next street was aware of the presence of the Beast, as Calder-Marshall calls him, but never summoned up enough courage to knock and ask if there was anything doing in the way of a Black Mass or a blood sacrifice. Fleet Street and Times Square must have mourned the passing of the Beast, who at one time was high priest of a pagan abbey in Sicily. Such doings are always assured of a following in California and New Mexico, where a grisly collection of unfrocked psychiatrists cruise from temple to temple, loaded to the gunwales with crisp green bills.

We returned to work, invigorated by water traces as we neared the dry bed of the Kuiseb river. These encouraged us to run inland in the course of the old stream-bed, and once again results were heartening. A few well-borings here might mean the possibility of a new village, or even a small town. This success alone justified our journey, and we were in good spirits as we approached Walvis, where there was food, drink, petrol, oil, and water, and best of all, a place in which to shelter from the oppressive heat. As luck would have it, we had a blow-out ten miles south of the place, and that held us up. The desert driving had not been the terrible chore we imagined, because of the hard coastal sand. Driving over the

dunes is a tricky affair, and the best men seek a way round them by some kind of instinct that I never developed, guessing the lie of the land on the invisible slope. We all had a turn at driving, and a sticky job it was, sitting in a kind of pool of sweat, trying to keep alert in an unchanging world.

Five miles south of Walvis we saw a native looking for bait or driftwood, and we hailed him, but he seemed anxious to avoid us, and seemed very surprised at our appearance. Not so an old man a little further on, taking a constitutional by the sea. I jumped out of the cab of the leading lorry and hailed him, eager for news of the outside world. He looked like an ancient cross between Bertrand Russell and Gary Cooper, thin, straight-backed, sure of himself. He had a Smuts beard, and was neatly dressed in a kind of Norfolk jacket and tweed trousers tucked into long snake boots. The stick he carried must have been for adornment, as he was spry enough, and wore no spectacles.

I introduced myself, but he seemed unimpressed. It was clear that we were far from headline news in Walvis and District. He did not even ask where we were from, although this was trembling on our tongues. As far as I remember, the conversation went like this:

"Would you like a lift into Walvis?"

"Not me, young fellow. If you spent more time walking you wouldn't be carrying all that fat on you. You should walk ten miles out every day, and ten miles back. Give you an appetite for your food, ready to tackle anything. You're a lot overweight, aren't you? Exercise. That's the thing. Keeps me fit. How old would you say I was, now?"

He looked about seventy-two, I thought. Trying to please him, I said "Sixty." I always understate ages in this way, like most people. The fact that practically everyone in the world looks his proper age passes the questioners by.

"Sixty, eh?" he repeated, looking a little disappointed. I am sure he had expected a much lower figure. He braced his shoulders "I'm seventy-three. What d'you think of that?"

I muttered some stumbling congratulations as Luke came up.

"Here's another one," said the stranger. "He's too fat, too. See how he drags his feet. You're hot, aren't you?" he asked Luke.

"Running out of me."

"Then why don't you get your clothes off and get into the sea?"

"I had a bathe yesterday," said Luke.

"Yesterday—you should be in every day, a young man like you. I'm a great swimmer," he added. "Great one for sport all my life. Run, box, swim, long walks, anything. And I'm still game to try."

Bob and Peggy came up, but the old man was examining our food

boxes. "Much d'you pay for that stuff?" he asked, pointing at a box. I told him.

"They robbed you, son. They robbed you. Barefaced robbery, that's what I call it. I wouldn't have paid it. I watch them. They wouldn't put anything over on me. I'd make them take it back, quick, too, if they tried anything on me. What are you doing in Walvis?"

I told him we planned to be there only a day or two.

"Why only a day or two? There are plenty of good jobs going there. You're not afraid of work? Most young fellows are, nowadays. Now when I was young I would tackle anything. Today they expect people to bring them money while they sit down moaning about bad luck. Now what I say is that you make your own luck. . . ."

"But . . ."

"Don't interrupt me, son, while I'm talking. Trouble with you is you're too fond of the sound of your own voice." Peggy hid behind the truck at this, while the old one ranted on. Bob tried to make a few points, and they were soon arguing. When Bob finished his piece the old man said, "You say that's your idea. I'd say it's not an idea at all, just a lot of repetition. Stick to the point, man."

When Bob returned to the attack, slightly winded, the old man said, "I've seen fights start over things like this. So that subject's finished. Let's talk about something else." He laughed. "That young woman you got there. What's she hiding from?"

Peggy appeared, and the old man tipped his wide-brimmed hat. "You don't look as if you'd been out here long, either." Taking us all in, he told us, "Don't forget what I said. Plenty of exercise and plenty of fruit whenever you can get it. That's what keeps you well. Do you drink, any of you?"

We admitted there was not a teetotaler in the column, apart from the Africans, who grinned happily at this unmerited testimonial. "That's bad," said the old man. "There's far too much drinking round here already. Place is full of drunks from morn till night. Only yesterday I gave a beggar some money, and you know what he did—straight in for a drink. But I wasn't beat. Not me. I went straight in and took my money back where he'd put it on the counter. He was standing there as large as life, and he'd ordered. He gave a yell, but I was out. I suppose he tried to tell the fellow inside he had put some money on the counter, but they took him by the seat of his pants and threw him out. That'll teach him a lesson."

"That's no way to behave," said Luke.

"It isn't. He should have bought bread and food."

"No, I mean you. You gave the man some money. How he spent it was his business."

"It was my money, not his."

"Suppose you gave me a shilling . . ." began Luke.

"Not me. I wouldn't give you a shilling. You should work if you want money. Had to work for every penny I got, and that's how I'm entitled to say how it'll be spent. If you look after yourself and your money, same as I've done, there's no reason why you shouldn't come out all right."

We left the old man, waving his stick and as chirpy as ever. He turned and headed back for the town at a good pace. Why he thought we were on the eve of a mighty debauch was hard to guess. We felt subdued after this encounter. If the remaining inhabitants were anything like the old man, we stood a fair chance of being run out of town on a rail.

"The old coot," said Bob. "Talk about blown up with your own conceit. He thought Luke was trying to bite him for a shilling. If this is good old south-western hospitality—think there'll be any more like that?"

"No. He's one of the big-headed old boys. You can't argue with people when they're as old as that."

Walvis was a dirty rat-hole of a town, but it looked good to us. The houses face north, against the prevailing wind, and this gives the streets, if such they can be called, a sad appearance. We passed a lorry in which sat the driver and, I presume, his wife. She was waving her hands before his face, and we caught a snatch of her fury. "You won't keep me waiting like this again. I'll tell your friends what a rotter you are. I'll show you up. You promised faithfully. . . ." The man sat, unmoved, staring ahead of him, as if this had happened many times before. I realized we were back in civilization.

CHAPTER VI

WRITERS AREN'T POPULAR

The town like a Western movie ; Swakop ; the White Lady of Brandberg ; to the Skeleton Coast.

WALVIS BAY is a most peculiar place. Writers are not popular there, as the few who have set their feet on this shore have made rude remarks about the town and its inhabitants. Yet it should have been a paradise for them. Practically every citizen has a Trader Horn story of his own.

The streets look as if the desert might reclaim them at any time. Sand from the dunes drifts around, and when there are no cars around, the sand gives the place a strangely desolate look. Prosperity was just round the corner. The fishermen were making money in sackfuls, and spending it as fast as they got it. Tens of thousands of tons of pilchards were being landed every season, and sold to the new canning factories. A man who was making £60 a week was thought a mere worker. There was even a big, *tsotsi*-clothes negro, attended by an admiring clique, reputed to be worth £60,000. This must be the only place in Africa where such things are possible. Three fishermen, anxious to get to Cape Town in a hurry, could not be bothered to wait for trains, and hired a taxi for £250, cash in advance.

I met four youngsters off a fishing boat, just paid off, who were buying 300 bottles of lager to see them through to their home station, four days away. They would not allow me to buy anything for myself, and when I refused the ever-present drinks accused me of stand-offishness. Everyone seemed well awash. I had so many free drinks in the sacred cause of good neighbour policy and the party spirit that I wondered how I would manage when exposed to the fresh air and sunlight.

Every night was Mafeking night in Walvis. The slightest excuse was good enough for a party. Anyone's birthday, the arrival of a stranger, or a ship, puppies for the bitch. Food was taken in the nature of a regrettable necessity, eaten at odd hours by the boisterous visitors.

Frankness was also in order. Complete strangers told the stories of their lives, and made the most personal remarks, but good humour prevailed, apart from an occasional ding-dong.

There were mysterious Englishmen who shied away from me, engaged in some peculiar enterprises of their own that involved options and lawyers. There were gloomy Afrikaners who refused to speak anything but Afrikaans, although it was quite obvious that they understood us perfectly. There were Krooboys from West Africa, with prognathous jaws and thick lips. The fishermen were always cheerful, and good company, but their habit of ordering cases at a time instead of bottles was unnerving. Not content with beer and lager, they nearly all had bottles of ginger brandy in their pockets, and at any flagging of the conversation, these were produced, and generous measures poured out for all hands, including anyone around. I forgot how many times I was invited to join parties and stay with them until the money was done, including travel and hotel expenses to points south. In the case of one trio, two men gave the third five pounds each a day, every day, taking it in turns to be the third man, who paid for drinks.

One man had the idea that I could start a barber's shop in the town, in opposition to the existing man. For some unknown reason this rumour circulated in the place, and quite a number of people tried to talk me into this plan. Others tried to dissuade me, despite my protests that I had no such intention. This was dismissed as camouflage.

Under the influence of thirty bottles of lager, two men tried to climb up the walls of one shop, with more success than seemed possible, while agonized proprietors wrung their hands. The trouble was that many men in their early twenties, recruited from factories in the Union, and finishing their first trips, had never had as much money before.

Our expedition reassembled with some stirring tales to share, but I was not in a mood to hear them, as I had been recruiting some surly labourers, by the simple process of impounding them in the street, to shift some stores, and was in a cold and practical mood. I thought it possible that our own bearers might lose themselves in the native quarter when they heard the clink of so many doubloons. One African, who had inherited a few small boats from his father, was now in the super-tax class, and there seemed no end to the possibilities with fish there by the million every time a net was taken up. I have not been able to look a pilchard in the face since.

One fisherman told me that at times uncounted thousands of fish were washed up on the coast here. Sharks and even whales were seen on the sands at these times. The scientists had been called in to confirm the local theory of submarine convulsions, but said it was really caused by water changes. (Trust the scientists to prove the laymen wrong.) But what water changes would cause mud

islands to appear off the coast? Or were these considered specks on the eyes of the local watchers, due to cirrhosis of the liver?

Walvis Bay is a busy harbour. Too busy, in fact, as many ships were held up by the lack of loading facilities, and they could have done with another dozen electric cranes. A lot of stuff comes here from Europe, on its way to Windhoek and points south, where the karakul breeders have been making fortunes. As most of the new rich are Germans, they place their orders in the Fatherland, true to form. I began to see why western Germany was climbing back so quickly.

A small group of guano kings round here were also making five-figure incomes. Whatever the locals spend their money on, and I have a good idea what that is, there is not much in the way of culture for the masses. The place is ugly, and reminiscent of a shack town, in some districts, from prints of old Kimberley. There is a fair amount of new building, but everything is subordinated to profit, and quick profit, so that the big boys can clear out and spend their winnings in more salubrious spots.

Peggy had been round town looking for fresh fruit, but there was none to be had. She took a dim view of the place, and was anxious to press on, regardless. She had met some fishermen, too, sprawled outside a house, complete with cases of liquor and enough food and tins to equip a Polar expedition. One of these men had hailed her arrival with joy, but the effort of climbing to his feet had been too much for him, and he had swung teetering over a basket of bottles before his shrieking friends lowered him to the sand. She had contrived to get a bath and general spruce-up, and this reminded us that after slaking our monstrous thirsts we had forgotten the decencies.

The rest of our stay was devoted to laundry, baths, make-and-mend, and general regrouping. The natives turned up, looking guilty, but we made no enquiries. We were asked a few questions about Sandwich Harbour, which we must have passed without noticing further south, but naturally could give no information. I had not even noticed a harbour. Maybe the sea has receded in this part, as it often does. It had struck us several times that the original shore must have been some miles inland. Maybe we missed this particular spot, however, in our inland turn for the Kuiseb.

Bob said Walvis reminded him of a Western movie, with its sandy streets and citizens rolling with the punches. Luke could remember the ice-cold lager best. Peggy recalled the shower of rain that had amazed the locals. A shopkeeper assured her it was the first rain that had fallen for five years.

We set off for Swakopmund, a few hours run to the north across the sand. This place was said to have a reasonable climate, and as

the local government officials came here from Windhoek during the hottest months of the year (Dec.-Jan.) there might be something in it. After Swakop there was nothing but desert all the way to the Kaokoveld.

There is a railway line from Walvis to Swakop, and we watched the Hereros in their colourful clothes as they leaned from the carriage windows. Swakomund and Walvis form a kind of oasis in the Namib desert. There is nothing to the south until one comes to the diamond fields, and nothing to the north for hundreds of miles, but the railway to the east is a link with Windhoek and thus with Johannesburg. Walvis lives on its fish and its harbour dues, but at Swakop the only attraction is the climate, so much cooler than the hinterland.

Outside Walvis we saw some young punks with rifles, looking for flamingos. Judging from the careless way they handled their weapons, it was dangerous to be anywhere in the vicinity. It looked as if they would shoot themselves before they got a bird.

There were jackal tracks in the sand. We saw a big bird resembling a puffin flying low over our heads, and many V formations of large birds over the water close to the shore. Considering that we were inside the Tropic of Capricorn, it was fairly cool, in the high seventies. We made a detour inland to see if there was anything worth shooting, and came across some *tsamma* melons, the first of many, resembling yellow footballs. The *tsammas* have not much to offer in the way of taste, but are reputed to be very nourishing. The *narras*, found nearer the coast, are a different kind of melon, but of the same family, I imagine. The *tsammas* were apparently shot up out of the sand, and were not attached to the parent plant when we found them, although they were new and juicy. The Hereros told us that their relatives knew how to make a porridge from the *tsammas*, but they contented themselves by sucking the juice out of ear-washing slices.

Gorged with food and drink, we had little to say until we spied Swakopmund. We had imagined an important and thriving place, with made roads and a lot of traffic, and felt dispirited at the sand between the German-style houses, and the general quiet. Swakop looked like Gopher Prairie-by-the-Sea. So this was the great health resort. Young men in *lederhosen*, wearing Austrian-style hats with little green feathers went by, looking very well. I looked with interest at rock gardens ornamented with slabs of rose quartz. Peggy said, "We're back in Germany all right. All the men looking fine and the women scowling like sergeant-majors."

We were in Germany, too. The shop fronts bore witness to that, and the language we heard everywhere. I went into the town's

hotels enquiring about mail, and found that practically everyone I saw was a ringer for Peter Lorre. Assuming I wanted accommodation, they all hastened to assure me that they were full up, although there were few signs of animation. Angry words passed my lips on two occasions, but the Germans shrugged their shoulders and smiled enigmatically.

I told my companion that the freedom of the city was not to be conferred upon us after all. Bob had been looking in a photographer's window, where there was a picture of the local youth at drill, looking very military. Bob said, "They don't look like Boy Scouts to me," and turned to find a man glaring at him with bitter animosity.

I explained that the German inhabitants of South-west were Hitlerites in 1939, and in 1940 had been sitting down patiently and confidently awaiting the news of a British surrender. Having grown rich and fat in the succeeding years, they were now ready to throw their weight about again, reinforced by thousands of immigrants from the Fatherland, most if not all of whom had fought against us for years. As they were now British subjects, and residents in the territory, they had a better legal right to be there than we had.

"They don't like us," said Luke. "They vote Nationalist to wipe the eye of the English, but they don't like us either."

"Of course they don't," said Peggy. "You're only a bunch of Dutchmen to them."

"Sixty years ago," said Luke. "Hermann Goering's father was High Commissioner out here. Do you know there is still a Goering-strasse in the capital here, at Windhoek?"

"It wouldn't surprise me if Hitler and Bormann and company were out here now, writing their memoirs," said Peggy. "There's plenty of room here to hide the whole German army."

Having parked the lorries and given the staff the day off, we explored the town. This took about ten minutes. There was a stone mole, on which was a noticeboard saying that fishing was prohibited without a permit. To anyone who knows South Africa this is most unusual, for the emphasis throughout the Union is on the maximum of individual freedom, and there is no charge for admission to places of interest, museums, art galleries and suchlike. Yet here was the Teutonic board with its *verboten*. We tried to think up a name for the official who had thought it all up, and decided it would be something like the *Obersturmbannführer*.

German officials walked on the mole, ponderous in grey tweeds, laying down the law on European politics in guttural five-syllable words. In the cafés they sipped a ghastly coffee with cream cakes, just as if they were on the *Kurfurstendamm*. Broad-beamed women, their iron-grey hair done up in military buns, strode along followed

by dachshunds. A lighter note was struck by a woman who had a porcupine on a leash. Knowing that my word alone would not be accepted for this, I hastened to Peggy for confirmation. She agreed. It was a porcupine, and, she added, a smell-less one. The only porcupines we had seen before were in the London Zoo, and they certainly made their presence felt. But with true Teutonic efficiency the pet of Swakop left no tell-tale traces behind him as he took his promenade.

But if the porcupine had no smell, as much could not be said of the beach. There was suddenly a dreadful stench from the sea, so bad that we burst out laughing, to the disgust of two grey-faced, grey-suited men discussing strategy. This happened at intervals during our stay, and is apparently the same sort of thing, but on a larger scale, that we had noticed further south.

Bob seemed dispirited. "If they come here for a holiday, these Heimes," he said, "what can the place they come from be like?"

As we got to know the place better, we found there were inhabitants who used Afrikaans or English as a first language. It was noticeable, however, that they did not seem as prosperous as the Germans, who were in control of all important industry as far east as Windhoek and beyond. The chances for a Britisher setting up shop for himself looked very slim indeed. As in Tanganyika and elsewhere, the fruits of the soldiers' hardships had not been gathered, and the enemy, continuing a lost war by other means, had recovered everything. The surge of immigrants was also significant—154 Germans in one month. Other nationalities—nil.

While we were there a train pulled in from Windhoek, known locally as the week-end special. The spectacle of the *goons*, as we called them, regaling themselves on iced lager, cream cakes, and big steaks, was too much. We retired to our own gloomy thoughts, while Luke claimed that any scheme for relieving the Germans of their riches could be regarded as having moral sanction. Bob said he had not seen so many Chryslers since he was in Detroit, and the sight of portly Huns using Leicas and Super-Ikontas to photograph each other, while Polar explorers had to make do with Brownies, was enough to make the Statue of Liberty rock on her pedestal.

None of us was a water-drinker, and this was just as well, for the Swakop water had strange overtones. Sugar put into the coffee had the consistency of chewing gum, and the tea was rather like senna pods mixed with salt. But I doubt if many people drink water straight in this area, apart from the natives. As in the case of Walvis, supplies are obtained from wells in the dry river beds in the hinterland. At one time Walvis supplies dried up, and a shipload of water was sent up from the Cape. If the same thing happened today,

there would be enough beer in the place to keep most of the locals going for a fair time, baths included.

Luke decided to try the local beer. "It's a German town, and I'll bet my last pound the beer's good," he claimed.

"How far is your last pound removed from your first pound?" asked Bob.

"A thousandth of an inch. We spent all our money fighting alone the first halves of those World Wars you won." Luke ducked as Bob aimed a punch at him.

The beer *was* good, too. Ice-cold, pale-yellow, translucent. The Peter Lorre character who served us was a graduate of the Nosey Parker school. "Have you come far?" he asked. "Yes? How are things in Walvis today? Any new ships in? Anything to sell? You are not in the fishing business?"

Bob pulled him up, examining his change. "What's this you've given me, flannel kopecks?" He waved a ten-shilling note issued by a private bank.

"I don't understand. Kopecks?"

"Yeah. When I left home they distinctly said don't take any wooden nickels. You make these yourself?" He returned the unfamiliar note. A long explanation followed. Apparently the note was all right, at least within the territory, being issued for purposes of convenience. But the locals were shaken, especially when we examined the change on every occasion in case any *Maria Theresa thalers* or *Reichsmarks* from the inflation period were included.

To make amends, when he was leaving, Bob said "Your beer's good."

"Everything we have is good."

"Smile when you say that, brother."

At night there was heavy fog, and we all felt miserable, and could not sleep. The fog stayed over the town until about nine in the morning. I do not know if this happens throughout the year, but imagine from the weather charts that it is typical of half the year at least, which means fog over this part of the coast for six hours out of the twenty-four, on average, all the year round.

We met some mining people from the hinterland, bright and cheerful men. They said the territory gave a bad name to the Swakopmunders for their reserve and money-grubbing ways, which were not typical. The fog was an attraction, not a handicap, being such a contrast to the hot interior.

At Swakop we were shown a big bronze bell, supposed to be from some lost ship, inscribed (in German) *Mengelbertus Josephus Fuchs has cast me at Cologne 1736*. I had an idea this was an old slave bell, used to call the natives back to the farm. There was also a great deal

of information about the White Lady of the Brandberg, a mountain about 90 miles north of us, 8,500 feet high. It was soon clear that we must go there. It was on our way, but even if it had meant a detour the whole thing sounded too good to miss, although Bob described it as "another load of bull" when he first heard the story.

The Abbé Breuil was quoted a lot by the local antiquaries, who had started a museum, and I discovered that the Abbé was Professor of Pre-History at the College de France and a member of the Institute, so what he said about antiquities must be taken seriously. The Abbé Henri Breuil was, in fact, the world's greatest authority on cave paintings. I got one of his books, published in 1949, with a foreword by Smuts. I could not get anything by him on the Brandberg, despite an application to Windhoek. General Smuts had invited the Abbé to study the Brandberg cave paintings, first discovered by a German policeman in the old days.

Breuil had been everywhere, studying the work of prehistoric man all over the world. He had even developed a talent of his own at freehand drawing. He put the origins of pre-men in central and tropical Africa and in the Siwalik Hills of Northern India. He thought in astronomical figures. It was only during the second half of the last Ice Age, after 70,000 B.C., he wrote, that men like those of today appeared in Europe. During the fourth Ice Age, there had been Neanderthal men in Europe, hunting mammoths, perhaps as far back as 187,000 B.C. He talked of fish 300 million years old, birds 120 million years old, and lemurs, the ancestors of the ape, 30 million years old. To the Abbé we were all, in fact, newcomers.

The Abbé had been fascinated by the White Lady paintings in the Brandberg caves. He had decided they were older than those of Zimbabwe, and suggested a vanished race from the Mediterranean. The White Lady was a figure on a frieze, with red hair, cut short in the style of ancient Egypt. She wore a beaded head-dress, a garment resembling a sweater, shorts, gloves, and a kind of girdle. The shoes looked quite modern. But so do many ancient Egyptian relics, like the zebra-striped couches. The White Lady, about twelve inches high, carried in her hand a white bow, and she also bore a white flower. It was clear to anyone who had ever read anything that the Abbé was right in saying the paintings were neither Bushman nor negroid. But what could they be? Could it be the Isis myth depicted by wandering Egyptians? Was the *She* story of Rider Haggard based on yet another native tale that has substance in fact?

What puzzled me was how the Abbé had found his way to the place in 1947, so easily. Even with the assistance of the Union government, it was no light undertaking for a man of his age. Most of the

people I knew who were crowding seventy would have fallen at the first fence.

I pointed out to Peggy, Bob, and Luke, that I had no definite information about these Brandberg traces, and that it was useless to talk about such things to the local lunkheads, or people whose addresses we had. They would probably think White Lady was a brand of whisky, and the issue would be blurred.

"How do they know they are not Bushman jobs?" asked Luke.

"By the absence of steatopygy, if that's how you pronounce it."

"Come again," said Bob.

"The Bushmen women have protruding buttocks. They stick out at the back about a foot or more. You can't mistake them. Carry extra fat there, or something. A white woman doesn't look like that, or shouldn't. Get it?"

Peggy cut in. "Maybe the Bushmen had seen a white woman somewhere and remembered how she looked. An artist would have a good visual memory."

"Maybe it's all the phonus-bolonus," said Bob "but we may as well have a look. Not that any of us will be any wiser if we see this white queen, or whatever she is. You don't think there's any chance that the white queen herself lives inside the mountain? You know, getting young every twenty years by bathing in the pink fire, like that movie."

"If I thought there was any of that pink fire left I'd be on my way now," I told them. "Boy, do I need it!"

"Maybe this French professor hit on this fire? That's what gives him all that zing."

In this casual way we committed ourselves to an adventure that had no real place in our schedule. The fact was that we could not bear the thought of returning and hearing people say, "What, you never went to the Brandberg. Why, the old French professor and his secretary were up there, etc." Peggy was anxious to get in some climbing, too, and was always the first to applaud any new venture, no matter how nerve-racking.

I had worries of my own about permits and papers. I was not sure just how far my passes and letters would take me, and to ask for definite instructions would be to risk a close watch on our movements. I might not be a welcome visitor inside the Kaokoveld, closed for so many years, and my terms of reference did not include a trip across the Kunene river that separates S.W. Africa from Portuguese West. Bob was anxious to set foot in the colony, if nothing more, just to improve his average. There were complicated problems about the Caprivi Strip, in which three governments were involved, while Kalahari travellers such as ourselves were supposed

to report to Mafeking. Had I sat down and written to all the authorities, I should have been at Swakop for six months, and maybe even then I would still lack some bit of paper. It had taken me six months in England to collect all the papers I had on me, some of them permits to do things in which I had now lost interest. One ages quickly in this business.

Had I confessed my worries to my friends, they would no doubt have recommended me to make a bonfire of every bit of paper we had, and danced around the pyre. But a semblance of legality is a useful thing to hang on to, especially inside the muddy walls of a tropical *calabozo*.

Bob had been out with a local girl, and praised the smallness of her appetite. His previous adventures with girl-friends who turned out to have the stoking capacity of eighteenth-century squires had proved very amusing. There was a story about a picnic at Stellenbosch for which he had thoughtfully provided a chicken. On returning to his car the young lady concerned said, "I finished my chicken. Are you going to have yours?" Bob was full of quips about his ill-luck in picking on girls like this. Another one, a Dutch girl, he claimed to have met on a train had polished off a pound of sausages, a big two-pound pie, and a tin of fruit before sending him for a quart of beer. Afterwards this girl went to sleep, or, as he put it, fell into a stupor.

Peggy defended these girls. "They have a healthy appetite. I wish I could eat like that. My stomach has got so constricted living in England that I can go all day on a boiled egg and a cracker."

"I don't mind people being hungry," said Bob, "but I draw the line at downright voracity. Talk about eating like a bird! I always get vultures."

Luke was offended at this talk, which he considered both slanderous and in bad taste, but his defence sent us into giggles, as he himself was what used to be called no mean trencherman. Bob said it was such as Luke who had stopped the free lunch business Stateside, and there were unkind references to trusses of hay and buckets of water.

In Swakopmund I had been introduced to the holy tree of the Ovahereros, a grey hardwood with a lovely name, the Omumborombonga, and asked Jacobus about it. He repeated the name with gusto, and said we would see plenty of them in Ovamboland, but it would be a big mistake to try and chop one down, as we would probably be chopped down ourselves shortly afterwards.

I asked him and Martinus about the Kaakoveld, and they showed no eagerness to rush up there. The place was swarming with precious stones, according to them, but it was "not a good place." I asked if any white man had made the crossing from Portuguese

West down to Swakop, and they said yes, a German, many years before, with four mules. Then there had been the men who were there for the ship, but they had come straight back, like sensible men.

This was the rescue party for the *Dunedin Star* in 1942, in which my friend Brand was involved. This expedition had cost £100,000. The *Dunedin Star* had struck between the Kunene and Cape Frio, and there had been immense difficulties in getting the survivors back to civilization. A tug and a big aircraft were lost, one man went mad, and two died. A big convoy of lorries and cars from Windhoek set off to work through the interior, and there were many breakdowns before the ship party was sighted months after the news was first radioed. As there were no roads, members of the rescue party had to spend a lot of time cutting bushes and trees branches, deflating and inflating tyres, and dragging tow-ropes through the sandy wastes.

* * * *

Our next run was a simple affair, up to Cape Cross on the Skeleton Coast. The police zone, as it is called, ends around here, and a special permit is needed to go further north. It should not be imagined that there are policemen between Swakop and Cape Cross. There is no one, black, white, or coloured except a few salt-diggers, and the Cross itself is no town, but a lonely cape where the first Portuguese navigators made an ill-chosen landfall. And there is nothing else beyond, for hundreds of miles, but desolation. Take away the man-made oases of Luderitz, Walvis, and Swakop, and there is nothing north of the Orange River for a thousand miles. The desolation made Peggy angry. "With irrigation," she pointed out, "you could settle millions of people out here. Look at Bushmanland, with all those kopjes and pepper trees. Baked earth and dust for hundreds of miles. Why doesn't somebody *do* something? You could put half Europe there, and they're always saying there's not enough food in the world. What's the good of having UNO if they never *do* anything? They need more women running things. Instead of holding meetings we'd send shiploads of people out here. If the Dutch could do it in the old days it must be simple enough now."

Luke agreed, and explained the kind of crops that might thrive. The Dutch in the old days were not tormented by doubts, he added. They just went, and made the best of things. People nowadays would demand guarantees of this and that, and assisted passages.

Peggy went further. "What's to stop us taking over a big piece of land now, and farming? I'm prepared to try it. There's acres and acres further north, isn't there?"

"Yes. Any amount. Thousands of square miles."

"With nobody in it?"

"A few natives."

"We'll organize them, show them how to do things our way. When we have grown a crop we'll send it south."

"On what?" I asked. "No roads."

"Roads—we'll make one. How did they get their stuff to market in the States when they were opening up? All they found were Red Indians and buffaloes."

"Excuse me," I said. "But let's have a look at the place before we start planning its future, and just for the record, how are we going to deal with all these rhinos and elephants and suchlike up there? With bows and arrows?"

"Somebody has to make a start."

I agreed, but had already made my mind up it would not be me. My idea of Shangri-La does not include roaring lions at the back-door. As far as I was concerned, any cat that weighed more than five pounds should be in a Zoo. I did not even hanker after tramping the stubbles back Europe-way with a gun under one arm and a hound-dog trailing behind. Put me within easy reach of the football grounds and movie-houses and pea-and-pie shops, with a pub on the corner, and they could keep the great open spaces.

"Then what are you doing here?" asked Bob.

"Visiting."

We ran into a few scattered huts, the homes of the salt-diggers, who make a bare living hacking the slabs of rock salt, grey, coarse stuff, that is used at Swakop and Walvis. I had had enough of this foggy coast, and was quite relieved when we failed to see any seals. These would have meant a delay in striking inland for the Brandberg. During the season men come up this coast on lorries, shooting the huge bull-seals that would tackle a man, and clubbing the rest. The oil is the prize, and if the seals had any sense they would pick another place for their annual gathering.

A salt-digger told us that there were men living on their own further north, on a permanent fish diet. They must be as crazy as the seals, for this coast is well named Skeleton. Scorched by day, sodden with fog at night, it is no wonder that the hermits are supposed to be "queer."

"Do they talk to themselves?" asked Bob.

"They talk to themselves first. Then they talk to the jackals. Then the jackals start answering them. Then the jackals start bringing their friends."

CHAPTER VII

THE VALLEY OF LEOPARDS

*Guns at the ready ; the Brandberg Caves ; sport and scouting ;
animal magic ; Dr. Gross the wanderer.*

ON the way to the Brandberg we heard that there were many leopards in the area, and many more in the north, in the Kaokoveld. The locals worried more about leopards than about lions, on the ground that lions usually ran off when discovered, while a leopard would always have a go, unless surprised by a party. I guessed that the southward migration of baboons that year, due to the prolonged drought, had brought the leopards. I had been told that 100,000 baboons went south from their usual haunts, eating everything up in the mealie fields and damaging what they did not eat. Leopards are very fond of young baboons, and as they like rocky country, like the cougar, they had come into the mountains to prey on the wandering game and baboons. Ten leopards could account for a thousand baboons in a short time.

In Europe a leopard is not thought much of as a dangerous adversary, being so much smaller than a lion, but in Central and South-west Africa the hunters give them plenty of attention. Jim Brand, for instance, told me that a leopard (the Afrikaners call them tigers) would "see off" a lion, and to back up his words a leopard killed a lion about a fortnight afterwards.

If leopards were about, it was best to take precautions. I gave everyone a bottle of TCP disinfectant, in case of a scratch, as a wound could poison the system in short order. Then arms, ammunition, and plenty of practice. We left the natives out of the arms distribution, but showed them how to have a loaded gun ready and handy beside the firer. In emergencies split seconds count, and training is everything. We had such a medicine chest that we could tackle almost everything, and that helped us to face any possibilities. Many lives must have been lost because of the recklessness of the pioneers, some of whom thought that Providence alone was a sufficient shield.

Coetzee cheered us up with a fine kudu buck. Venison for supper. I got half a dozen guinea fowl next morning and between us three more buck. Then there was a fruitless chase after a bush pig, and I was not unhappy. The tusks on these creatures are long enough

to rip a man to pieces, and a plunge into bush might disturb some sleeper we were not anxious to meet.

The natives were out with dog packs one day, no doubt chasing the leopards away. These dogs look wild to a European, and some have a hyena, others a wolf-like appearance. I was not struck on these, or on the jackals, as the rabies known to be in the country might affect any of these animals. I therefore advised everyone to shoot any dog or similar creature that approached our camp and ignored a stone thrown at it. Undue boldness is one of the signs of the disease.

I made a number of enquiries about lions, and was usually told that there had been some in the district, but how long since it was hard to say. I got the impression that no lions had been around for years, but it was a matter of prestige to keep the stories green.

A word or two about our armament. I had a Martini .303 rifle and a couple of .32 Webley automatic pistols, a shotgun, and a Mannlicher-Schonhauer peep-sight 6.5 mm. To the novice this might seem ample for a desert run in Africa, but for big game it is no armament at all. Anything less than a .375 magnum (high-velocity) is useless against the thick-skinned heavy animals, and most of the professional hunters carried much heavier weapons. There is a limit to carrying capacity, however, and no one on a pleasure trip wants to take more than two guns. Beyond that it becomes an expedition, and an expensive one.

I cleaned my own weapons, not trusting the natives to do the job properly. This is a lot of trouble in great heat, but has to be done if one is going to get the best out of the gun. It is best to use a sling for ease of carrying, although some people say this is a silly idea because of entanglement in brush, noise, etc. The new high-velocity .22 rimfire rifle is useful for small game, as the ammunition is non-fouling, and there is no need to clean the gun after each firing. A .22 is handy for all kinds of things, and can almost replace a shotgun for many purposes. The shotgun is too noisy, in any case, and scares off anything big.

Going after rhino or hippo or lion with a service rifle or a .28 seems to me like a messy way of committing suicide. Half a dozen people do it every year. Skill on a range in Europe or the States is not much help in Africa, as most shooting is done from very close range, one might almost say revolver range. Under such circumstances what the hunter needs most is something that will push over the enemy, win or lose. Shots that rebound or make him cough will not stop a charging buffalo or elephant. That is why the professionals lay such stress on close range work, etc. At long range the ordinary rifle bullet will only madden the game, and make him more

dangerous than ever, unless he is hit in a vital spot, and these are few.

What a man needs is the nerve to take a professional's advice, and get right up close with something that comes just under artillery specifications. If a novice dislocates his shoulder on the job, that is not much of a penalty in the bush, and will teach him to learn to handle his gun better. Most people refuse to practice in advance, thinking nothing of paying £200 for a week's sport to the hunter, and niggling at half a crown a round for practice shots. Clean weapons are essential, as insects and caterpillars in Africa are of nightmare proportions, and may take a liking to the thin film of oil in a barrel.

For these reasons I was not nearly as cager to encounter a lion as the other members of my party, who complained that if we got back without one we would look like a bunch of Jessies, or words to that effect. I knew from previous experience that with the ordinary small calibre h.v. rifle the bullet often passes right through an animal, and there is not even much blood spoor in the event of a hit. The prospect of 500 lbs. of wounded pussy lying in wait for our noisy greenhorn group passing through thick bush was discouraging. I could hear the crunching of bones in my ears.

* * * *

The Brandberg mountains lie about seventy miles east of Cape Cross, and 100 miles north-east of Swakopmund, on the edge of the coastal desert. In case any of us were not keen Peggy said, "We shall pass this way but once, so let's have a look at it."

There was some kind of a trail from Kalkfeld direction, so I aimed that way. The mountains, shooting up out of the waste, seemed close at hand, but in the clear light distances cannot be judged off-hand. The going got worse as we left the coast. We saw a dry river-bed, and there were big cracks in the dried-up earth around.

Nearer the foothills there were kokerbooms and a large red flower. There was no sign of game, but we had the feeling that there was plenty around. Skirting patches of scrub and big boulders, we got to the range, which did not seem to offer much difficulty to climbers. Maybe the Fire Mountain had got its name in the dim past, when it rose suddenly out of the desert, sputtering and sparking. In this place I would not have been surprised if a brother mountain had suddenly risen before me. We tried a scramble on the scree, but the sun was too low in the sky for a serious effort, and we rejoined the natives below in the plain. Biltong, biscuits, and coffee put us in a good frame of mind to appreciate the magnificent sunset. The granite peaks showed up orange and pink against an indigo sky, and we stared speechless at the swirling mists of colour on the western horizon.

As soon as darkness came down the silence was broken. I heard the bark of a baboon, and scrambled by Luke to get at the brass bell.

"What's that, a baboon?" I asked him.

"You're getting neurotic," he said. "Baboons won't come near a fire. You know that."

I made up the fire, and shortly afterwards glimpsed a leopard, skulking above us on the scree. He did not reappear, and after that we took it in turns to keep watch. I was more worried about hyenas than leopards, although these are bad enough. The hyenas have a horrible trick of taking a quick bite at a sleeper's face before they bolt, and their iron jaws leave frightful scars.

We heard the screams of several animals during the night, no doubt the kills of a number of leopards. They used the mountains as a sanctuary, coming down to feed at night.

The dawn rose swiftly from the red desert in the east. Over coffee and eggs we laughed at our jokes in the soft pearly light. It was delightfully cool, and there was no hint of the frightful heat of early afternoon.

We wasted no time. The Brandberg is only eight and a half thousand feet, and this is nothing by Swiss or Andean standards, but in the tropics any hard effort has its dangers, unless one is fully acclimatized.

We found the White Lady cave, and found it impossible to photograph the frieze, lacking elaborate equipment. I was reminded of ancient Egyptian petroglyphs, but we were not all of the same mind. Peggy thought it possible that a Bushman artist of great promise might have seen a white woman, perhaps washed up dead on the coast, or perhaps owned an Ancient Egyptian engraved jewel. The archaeologists, she thought, might underestimate the power of the artist in ancient times. She recalled the wonders of the Lascaux caves and the lifelike nature of the art of stone-age man. Maybe a ship from ancient Crete had been wrecked off the coast. Who knows? The experts should in any case have another look at the Brandberg and the Erongo. Was it possible that three thousand years ago there had been meetings in this rocky amphitheatre. Had there been light-skinned people speaking a lost language? There were recurring legends all over Africa relating to a white queen ruling from a mountain fastness.

There were other caves overlooking a ravine, and as we poked around these there was a cry of "leopard!" On a ledge above us was a vicious-looking Spots. I was amazed at his nerve in facing us in daylight. I despatched him with my rifle, and a minute or two later Peggy finished off another—maybe the mate of the first—with her .32 automatic, putting the blast on Spots in great style. Things

were getting hot in several senses. I led the way to the summit at a good bat, and we were rewarded with a wonderful view, with fresh peaks fifty miles away, the Spitzkop to the south, and rolling dunes to the west.

By the beacons, there had been plenty of people there before us. We picked up a few mineral specimens, and made our way down. It was not much of a climb, but what with the forked sticks ready for snakes, and the brazenness of the leopards, we felt we had had enough archaeology for the day.

Bob had found a big nest on one of the high crags, probably that of an eagle. It was as well the owner was away from home.

We scrambled down in short order, cleaned the guns, and ate heartily. Luke preened himself on the fact that many of the locals in the mining camps nearby would envy him this trip.

After comparing our sketches of the cave paintings and our theories about their origin we decided to get out of the valley of leopards after next sunup. An amendment to the effect that we strike camp at once was very well received by the Herero and Bantu elements, not to mention some of the Aryans.

Peggy now borrowed a rifle and looked round for a steenbok or even a kudu, eager to add to the score, before we moved off.

Luke's forecast that the mining camps would be interested in our adventures was proved wrong. Tantalite-columbite had been discovered not far away. This is a rare strategic mineral, worth £3,000 a ton, and far outweighed any other news. What we were offered was jobs, at £75 a month for each man. My protests that I knew nothing about the job were disregarded. What was important, the boss said, was to get the right kind of people. As far as he was concerned, people who made their way out unasked were the right kind of people. I was given full information as to how to get my visa extended, and how to set about fixing things up with the immigration authorities. Until then I had thought no one could crash mining without certificates and a parchment or two, but the engineers work on the theory that one volunteer is worth three pressed men.

These mining engineers are fine fellows, who have been everywhere and done practically everything. They think, like young Americans, in planetary terms. The Andes was over there, and the Himalayas that way. Europe was a place for a vacation. They judged countries by the way their lavatories worked and the coldness of their beer. I was able to assure them that their theories about the Soviet Union on these scores were only too true, and my story about a cynical inscription chalked on the wall of a Russian *abort* appealed to their gusty humour.

We heard of more wonders around, of a bottomless lake with blind

fish, black melon-like cannon-balls of nature that were full of amethyst, and mountains guarded by porcupines.

We camped in the mountains, and had some good sport. I got some guinea fowl and even a partridge. The guinea fowl were very thick on the ground. The larder was full. We ate pineapple slices from tins as a celebration of something or other, and Martinus turned up with some wild honey. We spent a little time scouring around for gemstones, but the specimens we found were poor stuff. Scraps of aquamarine are common enough, but Peggy did not even care for this stone.

Peggy had a story about a guinea fowl that had tried to trip her up, but we ignored it. We did not ignore Jacobus when he produced a small bone, about three inches long, that he said was a guaranteed luck-bringer, from the shoulder of one of the leopards. This bone was fan-shaped, similar to the wish-bone of a fowl. The natives seemed to prize this bone as much as the gall-bag, the juice from which is supposed to give the drinker tremendous speed and stamina. They were very surprised when I returned it, and there were arguments as to who should have it. I would have preferred a skin, but to preserve this it would have been necessary to have a big sack of salt. I had intended to buy a sack of salt as material for presents to the Kalahari Bushmen, but had seen no need to carry it on the first part of the trip. What with our having passed through a salt-cutting area, where it could have been picked up for nothing had we bothered, my prestige was much reduced.

I questioned the natives, as well as I could, about the use of the bones, as Luke seemed to regard the whole business as nonsense. The *dolos*, or divination by bone-throwing, is common enough all over Southern Africa. The bones are carried in a gall-bladder bag, and are thrown by the witch doctors in the same way as dice, after being cupped in the hands, spat on, and prayed to, etc. The present crap-shooting game is clearly derived from the *dolos*, and is still called "rolling the bones" in the southern U.S. From what our Kaffirs said, the top-class witch-doctors would roll the *dolos* only for people they approved, and then tell them what was going to happen, "seeing" the events in a kind of trance. Luke pointed out that whatever the Kaffirs might say, the bone-throwers in Zululand had been investigated, and their forecasts were not up to much, although he admitted that a prominent official of the health service had been greatly impressed by a wizened old wizard. For my part, I had no wish to know the future, even if I had believed it possible. Fancy throwing the bones, and seeing the future, on Aug. 31st, 1939!

There was a lot of this animal magic in the district. The natives believe they will acquire the characteristics of the animals they eat,

and this explains the strange antipathy to fish, and the love of odd bits from the carnivora. The *dassies* were despised, despite their food value, because the natives thought they would become timid through eating the flesh.

Bob was interested in this piece of research, and went off on another line of his own. Dr. Gallup would have been proud of him. I heard him asking Jacobus and Martinus if they were downtrodden.

"Oh, yes," said Jacobus, smiling broadly. Martinus laughed, too.

"Crushed down to the ground?"

"Oh, yes." They chuckled, showing white teeth. Luke walked away, disgusted. I could see Jacobus and Martinus were trying to agree with Bob, who said, "No. I mean are you unhappy?" Jacobus assumed a doleful look, having caught the word "unhappy."

"Unhappy, baas?"

"Yes, unhappy with the government, say?"

"Which government you mean, baas?"

"Your government, of course."

"We got no government, baas."

"You don't vote?"

"No."

"You want a vote?"

"You want us to vote for you?"

Bob gave it up, but not for long, for on the way to Franzfontein we ran into Dr. Gross, a bearded German scientist, in bush jacket and shorts, on a prospecting trip for a museum, and Dr. Gross knew everything there was to be known about Hereros, Ovambas, Bushmen, Xosas, and what have you. He knew all about Lugers and Mausers, too, and I wondered where he had acquired his knowledge, but he was vague about the war years, in the manner of most Central Europeans, and talked much more about Vienna than Berlin.

"The German and Austrian museums lost many of their greatest treasures as a result of the bombing," he pointed out. It was clear that if Dr. Gross had anything to do with it the treasures would soon be back where they had been. In the interest of international goodwill we gave him coffee and biscuits, and I did not refer once to the bust of Flora, by Leonardo, although I was anxious about its fate. This bust was bought by the Director of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, and exhibited to many thousands of admirers, before the appalling revelation was made. It was the work of a Cockney artist named Lucas. The Germans refused to believe that their museum authorities could have been deceived in such a way, and by the English, of all people, so there was a tacit agreement with the Berlin press that the slanders abroad should be ignored. The bust stayed in the Museum, although a few staff changes were made.

Time heals all things, and the grave error of the German authorities in Holland during World War II, in buying the paintings of the Dutch artist Van Meegeren as genuine Vermeers, for hundreds of thousands of pounds, had obliterated the traces of previous misadventures.

These palmings-off are more common than is realized. An artist I know told me that he had perfected a technique of baking a picture and then leaving it under his kitchen sink for a few weeks to produce the verisimilitude of great age. In the hope that Dr. Gross and his friends might be induced to buy a few of these—for all I know they are on the line already, I did not enlarge on the subject.

Dr. Gross was a music-lover, and was pleasantly nostalgic about Salzburg festivals and the international fellowship at the recently revived Bayreuth. I told him of my days in a theatrical boarding-house, surrounded by Valkyries and Rhine-maidens, who made the ornaments on the what-not dance when they let go with a few shattering chords. These buxom ladies, who had the lungs of Channel swimmers, were due to appear at the local theatre in a Wagner cycle. Although I did not tell the worthy doctor, the fact was that I felt like a fawn among buffaloes when I lived among the singers, who were all of what is euphemistically called generous proportions. I remember the star of the show drinking beer out of a pint pot, banging it down, and saying, "That's good. First today!" Had the way not been paved, the singers would have worn a good wide trail between our house and the local pub, before Valhalla crashed into flames with such blasts of noise and rolling of thunder that the local miners' wives rushed into the street, thinking there had been an explosion.

The doctor was a short, energetic man, and he was devoted to long tramps, like a *Wandervogel* of the early "thirties." In his knapsack he had two thick books to prove his devotion to scholarship. Reading, he said, was his solace in the lonely places of the veld. We echoed his sentiments, but were startled by his choice. The title was something like *The Theory of the Teutonic Folk-Myth and its Relationship to the Problem of Self-Determination in Saarland*, in two volumes, by someone with a name like Gunther Aschkusser.

The doctor was unwilling to show us his rock samples, and when we showed interest at this reticence, he bade us good-bye, with handshakes and courteous bows, and clicking of heels. Overcome by bush hospitality, Peggy gave him a bag of sugar candy to help him on his way to Franzfontein, and as a reward he took our pictures with a Rolleiflex that I greatly envied.

"I like the way the Germans announce their names as they shake hands," said Peggy. "At parties I never hear the name of the

person I'm introduced to. It's always 'This is Mr. Blur and Mr. er Blab has been dying to meet you, and, yes, this is Mrs. Blob.' "

Bob told the story of the Afrika Korps captains, strangers to each other, who met in the cage at Tripoli. The first clicked his heels and announced himself " Klapper."

" Boom," answered the other, stamping his feet.

" Klapper, Klapper! " repeated the first man, slightly upset.

" Boom, Boom! " shouted the other.

" Klapper, Klapper, Klapper! " screamed the first.

" Boom, Boom, Boom! " roared the other. It was just as well a major came along to prise this well-matched pair apart.

* * * *

The going was rugged, and it had become very hot, so much so that a *klipspringer*'s feet we examined were slightly burned. We had not intended to kill the *klipspringer*, which is no bigger than a chamois, but there it was. We mistook it for something more important. I was disturbed by the drought, for it might drive herds of big game from the Etosha a long way south, and that might mean complications. There was still uncertainty about the state of the Okavango and Kwando rivers. If these were too wide to cross, it would mean a detour to the south. If the drought continued long enough, we might be able to cross into the Caprivi Zipfel and have a good reconnaissance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KAOKOVELD

*Blank on the map ; the Kunene river ; ox-ride in the mountains ;
the great unused air strip of the Etosha.*

THE inhabited portion of South-west Africa is wedged between two deserts, the Namib on the west coast, and the Kalahari to the east. The Namib, 800 miles long, and from fifty to ninety miles deep, covers in all about 40,000 square miles of supposedly uninhabitable country.

The Kaokoveld is a largely unexplored area, south of the Kunene river, and lying between the huge Etosha Pan and the Namib coastal desert. The natives of this area, who are dominated by the Hereros, have a name for being warlike. There may be some basis for this, as under the German occupation the more aggressive spirits would fly to the north and settle in the wilds.

The natives who live on the borders of the Kaokoveld speak about it with terror, even today. People who venture across it, I was told, are eaten by wild beasts or go mad. I knew what had happened to a shipwrecked British crew in World War II, if only at second-hand and by hearsay (I heard later that the BBC had broadcast an account of the adventure). The survivors of the wreck had suffered terrible privations. Some died, and some went crazy, the remainder being rescued by the local government after a ghastly journey across the cocoa-coloured scrub, tearing their feet to pieces on the tiny thorns.

This is the area where Magistrate Van Ryneveld was killed in 1924 by a poisoned arrow from the Bushmen. Van Ryneveld suffered agonies before his death, and the action of the poison was so rapid that his body fell to pieces next morning when it was moved.

It was in the Kaokoveld that the great Thirstland Trek ended, before the first Boer War. 900 Boers trekked from the Transvaal across the Kalahari and into the Kaokoveld, the journey taking four years. Five hundred and thirty perished en route. The survivors lived in the Kaokoveld for some years, hunting elephant and carrying on some kind of agriculture, but the endless labour and inhospitable land finally sent them on their travels again, this time to the north, across the border of Portuguese West.

In this century few people have bothered with the place, and many South Africans today are not even sure of its location. The original

inhabitants of the Kaokoveld were the Mahimbas, but they have been put into subjection by the Herero immigrants, who know something of agriculture, and learned soldiering from the Germans.

Major Hahn, who knew this area better than any man, maintained order and peace by skilful diplomacy and the legend of his far-seeing eye. Nothing escaped him, it was said, from the crocodiles on the Kunene down to the police post at Kamanjab, last outpost of civilization on the way to the north.

The trail to the Portuguese border is studded with the graves of the Boer trekkers—indomitable Bible-reading, pipe-smoking men, wonderful shots. These bearded heroes were as remote from the modern world as Cortez and Pizarro, yet I am informed that some of their descendants are still plying for hire as mercenaries in Portuguese West.

I kept away from the Mahimbas, who never wash, but rub their bodies with sheep fat, carried in a grease-bag worn round the neck. An aristocrat can be recognized by his carrying a Heinz Baked Beans or similar tin instead of the usual dirty bag.

One of the troubles about the Kaokoveld is that with no white visitors the presence of a white man is a well-advertised event on the bush telegraph, while a white woman is guaranteed to bring even the Mahimba equivalent of whistle-stops into feverish activity.

What with the stink of the natives, the frequent drinks of *omeira*, made of fermented milk, and the maddening clouds of midges, which always make for the eyes, a journey in the Kaokoveld can be compared with an extra-long attack of the jagers or roovis-rooveys.

There are rifles and muzzle-loaders in the land, but the owners thereof are such bad shots that they praised me as another Nimrod. There is any amount of lion, elephant, antelope, guinea fowl, pheasant, and partridge. It is not so much sport as murder, with flocks of fowl running in hundreds and thousands. South of Ubombo are the familiar rolling plains that one sees in travelogues of Central Africa, although the films have never been made in this area. Giraffe, zebra, springbok, and gemsbok exist in large numbers.

I had no intention of hunting for trophies, never having had an ambition to mount heads on a wall, so no doubt I missed many opportunities. I was more interested in the personalities of the ivory poachers who trek across the Kunene from Portuguese West. Yet there is a wonderful exhilaration about bringing off a perfect shot, just behind the shoulder, when a buck appears for a second, side on, from behind a buck. It is hard to resist the thrill of blazing away when the game is falling fast, especially when one's companions are urging on the massacre with excited cries. There is indeed a boy in every man, and that does not mean some-

thing out of the age of innocence but something out of the heart of the jungle.

In shooting, there is another and baser thrill—that of competition, when someone else is having a go alongside. The urge to shine, to outdo other people—is it merely “the last infirmity of noble mind,” as we like to call it, or is it just another piece of vulgar show-off? In the excitement of life in the wilds we had not time or inclination to examine our real motives, but I am sure a psycho-analyst would make something nasty out of them.

* * * *

North of the Kaokoveld is the Kunene River, which is a strange area. The river marks the boundary between Portuguese West and the Kaokoveld, and is very rich in game. Here a man can live as the Boers did in the early days, shooting for the pot and developing a peculiar alertness of body and an unwillingness to engage in the self-examination that is the curse of the intellectuals.

It is dangerous to go near the river without putting a shot into the water to scare off the crocodiles. These reptiles can move with great speed when hungry. Carelessness or day-dreaming can be fatal. Yet the natives are amazingly reckless. The high casualties do not worry them. There are strange stories about crocodiles. I heard one on the Crocodile River, away to the east, about a native who had been pulled in from the bank by a big crocodile. He stabbed the creature in one eye, then the other, trying to get his leg free. He finally got away, with the help of his friends, and the loss of a leg. Years later he was suddenly attacked while fishing on the bank, and lost an arm. Afterwards he kept going down to the river, assisted by his friends, and staring at the waters in a melancholy way. One day he crawled into the river and never reappeared. A blind crocodile was shot shortly afterwards in the same place. A legend? Maybe, but a similar story was circulating in Southern Rhodesia about an incident in 1952.

There are people who keep crocodiles and alligators as pets in London. It is a strange taste, and I only hope they never come to live over me. Most humans and animals have an instinctive aversion to reptiles, which must stem from a long way back. On a horse, one can feel the animal shudder with repulsion when he spies some deadly snake, and he gives what amounts to a snort of approval, cocking his ears and champing on the bit after the crack of the gun. As if to say, “I saw it first, but you can have the credit.”

The Kunene is not a well-known river. Visitors must be very rare. Has anyone climbed the Zebra Mountains? If so, I have never heard about it. There is a fine waterfall on the way to the

entrance into Angola (one customs shack) at Zwartbooi Drift. In the olden days the natives had to do well in battle before they could acquire cattle and bid for beautiful wives. Today, when battles are frowned on, the test is to trek on foot a few hundred or a thousand miles to a mine, work there for a spell, and return with money and goods. Some of these fellows think little of a five hundred miles walk through country infested with snakes and lion and wild elephant. Life is cheap, and nobody worries, least of all the people concerned. Nevertheless, civilization has reached out to these remote parts of Africa. Men have made their way to distant towns, joined armies, and visited strange lands. Childlike wonder has given way to self-confidence and authority. There is many a Ulysses wielding power in the wilds on the strength of his travels. Personally, I find it depressing to meet someone who talks about familiar haunts, in a chance encounter at the back of beyond. Just as one is thinking, "We must be the first whites ever to see this. This is a historical moment. Maybe the natives will set us up in a small way as White Gods," a man comes up wearing a leopard-skin hat and ragged trousers, announcing that he has met members of the British royal family, and inquiring after their health. This kind of thing happened to us once or twice, and brought my thoughts back to earth with a tremendous bump. Moreover, one is obliged to give out a theatrical version of the Court Circular, which probably contains numerous inaccuracies, besides laying one open to charges of snobbery, tuft-hunting, and fictitious claims of acquaintance with the great and near-great.

In the tropics chance acquaintances frequently assume that I know everyone "worth knowing" back home. It reminds me of the phrase current in the days of Edward VII in England that there were only 600 families that one knew. One did not, it seemed, marry outside the circle, on the pattern of some Polynesian tribal taboos. When I get back home, the situation is reversed. No one assumes that I know anyone. Butlers look at me with distaste, and hostesses greet me with that half-smile reserved for those who may turn out to be vacuum cleaner demonstrators.

In the Kaokoveld transport is a difficult problem. In the area called the Kaokoveld Mountains, which is a mess of scattered rocks and ranges, there are only narrow elephant paths along which jeeps, Land Rovers and lorries cannot move. This is the way to the chief Herero kraals, and no wonder they have few visitors. There are trained riding oxen about, and with bribes a Portuguese pony might appear, but these are rare.

The oxen have thongs passed through their noses as bridles, and the unfortunate riders have to sit on sheepskin "saddles." There are

black rhinos in the area, and many lions, which do not add to the gaiety if the prospect. An additional complication is the addition of some "riding masters" to what I call mead, having practised the art of brewing this honey beer myself with success—mine tasted like a rather poor French white wine, but was quite drinkable.

People who have not ridden an ox in the Kaokoveld Mountains accompanied by half-crazy, half-drunk, half-breeds are fortunate. I do not recommend the experience. I have ridden camels at times, and have wondered afterwards if I would ever get any feeling back in my hindquarters, and have even suspected the displacement of spinal links. But an ox-ride over stony ground is ghastly, especially as the animals get footsore quickly, and then lurch about in the most frightening manner.

The solution, to some people, was to drink so much mead that one was as wild as the country itself, at the beginning of a journey. It reminded me of the Indians of the Andes having a good chew of coca leaves, so that they would be well "hopped up" before a long trek across the great chasms on the rope bridges.

If UNO and UNESCO ever send expeditions out here they had better send well-covered specimens of scientist. Will scientific objectivity stand up to the strains of this part of the tropics? Everything is on a nightmare scale. Some kraal chiefs have as many as a hundred children, and some drinkers can shift as much liquor as a naval liberty boat's complement. The sun is merciless, and the bones of the earth are laid bare where grass and soil have been blown or burned away. Visibility is fifty miles from the high rocks. Distant objects seem close at hand. The sun-blinded Africans pray for the cold light of the moon. No sun-worship here—the brazen sky may not be looked upon. In such surroundings men live for the moment. Great hammers beat at the foundations of self-respect. Only the white man's discipline learned in colder lands can stand up to this poundings of climate.

The nights are beautiful. There is a bigger moon. There is the Southern Cross and the Milky Way, and the knowledge that far away to the east are the mighty ruins of dead cities, across the Kalahari wastes and beyond the Zambesi. At such moments life seems worth living, and the blood runs fast with excitement, like that of a child. In the silent desert and mountain it seemed to me that money did not really matter, and that a life dedicated to a noble cause is the answer to all our problems, public and personal. But in the morning I felt cool and practical again, involved with problems of transport, pay, and food. The night before seemed to belong to someone else—the talk of undergraduates intoxicated with youth and hope before they leave the grey academic walls for the asphalt jungles.

The Hereros have never forgotten the German occupation. Many Germans died of thirst, and their graves can still be seen scattered along the tracks. The doctrine of "frightfulness" was no Hitler invention, for before the First World War the German troops drove the Hereros into Thurstland to perish. Oxen, horses, goats, dogs, women and children died on the way, the black soldier auxiliaries of the conquerors polishing off the wounded as they advanced. The Hereros burned the grass as they retreated, abandoning the clothes and Bibles given them by the missionaries in a symbolic surrender of white man's ways. Great clouds of dust on the horizon marked the disappearance, and voluntary suicide of the fugitives, to the German commanders, intent on the maintenance of white superiority. The tribes were, in the Zulu phrase, "stamped flat."

In two generations, however, the descendants of the survivors of these massacres have emerged from the bush, and are now exceptional for pride and surliness. Probably only the toughest survived, in every sense. A Herero overlordship of this land of sand and sore eyes would create new problems that cannot be envisaged by people who do not know the area.

There were traces of recent elephant spoor and we could hear lions roaring at night in the foothills. It was good to be away from the shrieking sand, but we stuck close to the camp, afraid of surprise by a rhino or suchlike if we wandered off. The Kaffirs answered the calls of nature in double quick time after we had glimpsed a silent watcher on our threshold, who disappeared into the bush like a wraith.

Visitors should report at Kamanjab police post before venturing into the interior, and after that a hunter might not see a white man in a year or two. The boundaries of the Kaokoveld are not well defined, and are best described as the coastal strip west of the Kaokoveld Mountains and the hills and kopjes and bush as far as Ovamboland and the Omaheke country to the east. There is a plenitude of wild life because the animals have been driven into this fastness by the northward march of the white man. There can be few areas of Africa where there is so much game as the piece 200 miles long and 100 miles wide, of which the Kunene is the centre. North of the Kunene is Portuguese West territory, and we pushed on here, anxious to have a look and get back to our proper job. But it was necessary to deflate tyres, and a lot of time was spent on bush clearance. The big jack came in handy, but we were losing our impetus. Elephant flies raised blisters on us, and there were bumble bees that seemed as big as swallows. Sleep became more difficult, as even when thickly coated with repellent ointment, there was a buzzing and diving that lasted from about 10 p.m. to 4 a.m.

There was plenty of food to be had. With wild duck and geese and herds of small buck and impala and a few partridges, we lived better than at home. We lamented the absence of a few cases of the good Constantia wines, and made do with fruit juices and our own homebrews. There were waterholes, and it was obvious that a permanent settlement was possible. That would mean the slaughter of the big game and the enticement of the natives from their kraals as a servant class. The Kaokoveld would be a real haven for men on the run—a lamsters' paradise, as Bob called it. North and south of the Kunene, they could live for decades without interference. On the Portuguese side there are people who do not relish questions. They make a living by hunting and trapping, and questions of nationality and record are never raised as long as they stay in the hinterland.

Many years ago the Boer trekkers who crossed the Kunene and settled in Angola were upset by local tribesmen who stole the white men's cattle and swam them across the river. A posse was formed, and the Boers came across from Portuguese territory, and wiped the natives out. The Bushmen of the district were slaughtered in the early days, when a few German explorers penetrated this part. The descendants of the Boer farmers who went to Angola were offered resettlement about a generation ago, and made a strange spectacle, with their old-fashioned beards, pipes, and ox-carts. Many of them died of malaria, and I believe a few survive somewhere in South-west on government farms.

There is a frontier post of some kind on the Portuguese side of the river at Tschikado or Iscitado, well inland from the mouth of the river that marks the boundary. I gathered that visitors were expected to go all the way upriver in order to get visas stamped, and suchlike. But no one pays much attention to such things in the remote parts, where such a journey might entail a collision with a rhino or even a hippo, apart from the crocodiles.

I regretted the way in which the whole country had been allowed to stay blank, or nearly blank, on the map. At one time an English firm had owned the territory, but under the mandate the Union government, as trustees, had decided on a permanent native zone, with no interference from whites. A few missionaries have been in, mostly from Finland, I believe. What results they have achieved it is hard to say. One gets the impression sometimes that self-seekers achieve most in the way of altering a landscape. There seems to be a blight on an enterprise which is devoted to the well-being of more than half a dozen people. The few Utopian settlements that were started in this region came to a sad end by way of murder, madness, robbery, and pestilence.

I ordered the Kaffirs to make canoes for us when we got to the river, and went off to practise pistol-shooting, trying to shoot a patriotic ER on an empty petrol tin. Bob came up, and asked me what ER stood for. "Eisenhower Republican," said Peggy, flip-pantly, and looking around at the waste and bush, added, "It looks like a Republican year, too." Seeing Bob's expression she said, "If you're a Republican I'm only joking!"

Health was more of a problem than usual. We were all suffering from insect bites of varying depth, and the continual injection of these poisons into the blood brought a feeling of gloom and irritation. There were veld sores from the sun, that had to be treated with paraffin and candle-grease, left on the skin as a protective shield, and we all had cuts and abrasions from thornbush and tree splinters.

There was no sign of the Portuguese poachers who are supposed to keep up a steady cross-river trade, and it was difficult to see how they could scrape a living from occasional visits to the native kraals.

Across the river were lines of baobabs and the usual palms and omumborombongas. It was hot, humid, and sullen. As boat-builders I could see we would never make a reputation, and insisted on the Kaffirs trying out their products first before we got in. It was as well, as they were soon in the ditch. After some modifications and misadventures, Bob and Jacobus found a canoe that would float, and, taking a few provisions and a rifle, they paddled themselves over to the other side with square sections of box-wood, while we fired a few shots ahead of them to keep any crocodiles at bay. The noise flushed some game from the bush behind us, and we banged away, while Bob shouted, "There's no need to give me a 21-gun salute yet. Wait till I come back."

We sat down to write up diaries and read books, while the natives did the laundry and improvised clothes-lines. Peggy read a glossy magazine and showed me pictures of burly girls and very tall squires, all wearing an expression of constipated distaste. It was a breath of England.

Bob and Jacobus were away for half a day. They had met a colourful character on the other side, a white man with a load of *kari*, on the way to a native village. *Kari* is a mixture of various brews with methylated spirit, yeast, and a dash of tobacco to give it a kick. This is very crude stuff, and I was glad our members had refused it. A good deal of *kari* is drunk in the area, and in parts of the South-west territory, and the people who go in for it get D.T's. or some kind of mental collapse. Whites do not usually touch the stuff, apart from a few degenerates, but I could imagine a keen demand in a place where men had tired of *ernbe* spirit and *marulu* beer.

With a vegetable diet, mealie meal and sweet potatoes, the blacks did not have the resistance against these strong brews that a European would put up.

We had another couple of days in this spot, and learned something of the Portuguese border types. There was a big demand for kraal manure for the farms on the coastal strip. Nobody knew much about the Zebra Mountains. There were many big waterfalls in the river zone, but no sightseers. It is strictly business, something like the Panama Isthmus area outside the Zone. A hippopotamus head, roasted whole in the ground, was one of the local delicacies. Information was good and accurate about events in the outside world. We learned, almost as quickly as if we had been in telephonic touch, about an aircraft that had landed in the diamond zone No. 1, an Auster. The two occupants, young men from Cape Province, had been arrested by Peter Willers of the Diamond Police at Luderitz. The drought in South-west generally had got so bad that the farmers were trying to move stock south into the Union by rail and road—a really desperate undertaking. The Administration was sinking new boreholes inside the native reserves. This was good news.

I was advised to skirt the edge of the Etosha Pan and head back for Grootfontein area and the Kuringkuru. The purely northern route was not practical. Our change of plan would mean better trails and a chance of a quick look at the Caprivi Zipfel before heading south and east across the Kalahari waste, and then through to Southern Rhodesia by the edge of the Limpopo. The great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo would be the end of the voyage for us. After that we could break up. If there was time, maybe we could have a look at Portuguese East and come coastwise back to the Union from Beira. It was quite a lot of ground to cover, but flat bush country and desert would be a relief after the dunes and boulders.

The elephant poachers said that business in that line was nearly dead. Something had happened to the ivory. The tusks were soft and crumbly. Willy-nilly they had been driven into handling smaller game, and this was felt to be a bit of a come-down.

Some of these men were very strange in manner. It was interesting to speculate on what adventures had driven them to such a remote spot. I discouraged too close a fellowship, and practised Washington's policy—Have communion with few; be intimate with one; deal justly with all; speak evil of none.

We inspanned and headed south again. I warned everyone about prohibited game, as we now ran the chance of running into game wardens or their assistants, and there was no knowing how much bother we might get into over a stray shot. Two men had lost their lives over a mix-up like this, not long before, with a dead giraffe

causing the upset, turning the natives further north against the newcomers.

The Etosha covers thousands of square miles. It is not a Pan today in the old sense, when it was fed from the border river. Only bits of the Etosha are water-covered today. On the flat surface, we should have been very obvious from the air, against the white brine, had we kept to the Etosha. The place would have made a fine motor racing track, had it been near a town. The dazzling white salt was blinding, and we all had headaches. The sun-glasses were worth their weight in gold on this occasion.

There is some kind of a dry season route from Okaukuaajo to Namutoni, on the Ovambo river, but south of Ovamboland. People live around here, in isolated spots, and surrounded by jackals, hyenas, lions, zebras, and springbok. The salt and water attract the game, so the locals, whoever they are, will have no shortage of meat as long as the ammunition holds out. But it must be a miserable place in the rainy season, and a man will risk sudden death every time he treks south to Outjo or Tsumeb for supplies. It would be a good place to trap lions for a zoo. Anyone who takes on this job deserves his money. The roar of a hungry male makes the air vibrate, and even when they are two or three miles away they can scare people out of a year's growth.

The Kaokoveld had been interesting. The going was tough, but not impossible. Zoologists would find a rich field for study in the slight modifications such as the thick pads of the hyenas and the strange complaints affecting the elephants. The white rhino is up there. There are too many reports about him being seen. It is just possible that the rhinos have been wallowing in the Etosha salt mud, which would whiten them, but the hunters have good eyesight, and do not make many mistakes. Aircraft could be landed on the Etosha, which is a natural air strip, and a big aerial safari party could make some startling records. As for the mineral resources of the Kaokoveld Mountains, no one knows what there is there. Lone prospectors are discouraged. There is every reason to think that the red cliffs are as rich as those further east, in the mining districts.

The Kunene river has a mean flow of about 2,500,000 cusecs, and that means proper utilization could bring prosperity to the region. Surveyors never come this way, and the old maps are unreliable. There is need for a ten-year period of gathering information, with aerial photographic survey during wet and dry seasons as the essential preliminary.

CHAPTER IX

METEORITE PARTY

Missing the world's largest meteorite ; exploration is so quiet.

I AM in favour of meteorites. Every now and again one falls on some such place as Inner Mongolia or Northern Siberia. Scientists are rushed to the scene to describe the newcomer as being made of whorlrum or acidendum, or similar *um*. After that, nothing happens. It is a pity. A meteorite is the kind of thing I like to read about in the papers, almost as good as Devil's Footprints, twenty-five feet apart in the snow.

South-west Africa can boast (and does) the largest meteorite in the world, weighing about 60 tons. I don't know how they weighed it, and when I asked I was faced with blank stares. I was supposed to go and see it, not far from Grootfontein.

A man I called Oom Paul, because he resembled the late lamented President Kruger, invited me to go. I had to join him in a saloon. When I found him with two of his rather noisy friends he told me a story about President Kruger opening the Johannesburg Synagogue. The President staggered his audience by saying at the end of the ceremony, "I declare this synagogue open in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

After a few noggins of dop and lager chasers one member of the meteorite party asked me gravely if I could do the Indian Rope Trick. At this stage the saloon-keeper gave signs of unease, but Oom Paul rose to his feet and announced that if I could not do the Indian Rope Trick *he* could, and there was nothing no by god Indian could do that he could not.

Oom Paul demanded a stout rope for his trick. The fourth member of the party demanded to know if a snake were necessary for the Indian Rope Trick, but the man opposite me said, "We don't need a snake as long as you're here," beating his opponent on the back. People around us now began to order beer in quarts—something I had never seen in Britain. I felt more and more like a mouse that had wandered into a herd of elephants. Shouting arose, and chairs were overturned. There was no way out for me, barring illness, as the Afrikaners are easily upset.

One of the party told me it was time I made them laugh, instead

of sitting there with a long face like an undertaker. I told them a story, innocent but strange, about a mouse that had played football against two elephants. This was at least a gesture of goodwill on my part, and the audience brought me big steins of beer to show that we were all friends. It was impossible to pay for anything, as the Boers are also touchy about being thought meanies. Our table was now well awash, like most of those present. The conference bore no resemblance to those depicted on movie news reels. A crash and the splintering of glass announced the failure of Oom Paul to stay up the perpendicular rope held by his laughing assistants.

Oom Paul, only slightly disturbed, said, "If I'd been cold sober I'd have got up. If I keep trying I'll get the hang of it."

"You'll finish on a rope all right," said an onlooker.

"Like your grandfather," replied Oom Paul.

I rejected an invitation to feed on penguins' eggs, which, I was assured, had been specially prepared for me. We drove off in Oom Paul's car for the meteorite area, singing a Boer commando song. This, I decided, was the best way to pick up Afrikaans.

We never reached the meteorite. My companions were possessed of a strong social sense, and were in duty bound, they said, to call at the farms of their friends *en route*. Not to do so would be construed as unneighbourly, and in the nature of a snub.

We were welcomed by the farmers, who were taking their ease at this time of day. I declined to wrestle with one of our hosts. Apparently a wrestling bout is a frequent item in these home-made entertainments. It was bad enough getting my bones crushed shaking hands without rolling about in front of the stoep. The liquor was making the party sleepy, and the habit of chasing small animals along the track, while everyone whooped madly, was a little exhausting after a while.

Oom Paul, our leader, announced a change of plan. We were going fishing, he said. It would be dark before we got to the meteorite, and there was no point in feeling about a rock in the dark. The trip for fish, however, would not be affected by the dark. The fish would be livelier. We would go to his place, get some rods, lines, and bait.

I did not object to the change of plans, as there had been a rumpus at the last farm, where I had disputed the claims of the locals to be descendants of the original Voortrekkers. I put up the thesis that the ox wagons must have been made of elastic to accommodate the crowds. I drew comparisons with the *Mayflower's* holding capacity, and that of the Post Office in Dublin, and added a theory of my own about many of the original Boers being Irishmen who had changed their names from Finnegan to Vinbosch, and from Maginty to

Maritz, being Fenians on the run, every man. As these stories seemed incredible to my listeners, I described how a great professor at Trinity College, in a book weighing seven pounds, had proved Marshal Timoshenko of Russia to be none other than the grandson of Timothy O'Shenno of Limerick. Worse, this same professor, a man with a size $8\frac{1}{2}$ hat, was now working on a book proving the Irish were first in South Africa.

This attempt to pull the legs of my listeners was a stupefying success. It was not for nothing that I had listened to so much Boer propaganda from Coetzee. The party took it very seriously. Was there nothing I could do, they asked, to get the book stopped? Or get the Professor switched on to something else. They pleaded with me when I hedged. I was eventually talked into using such influence as I had, depending, as I pointed out, on how good a time I had myself in South-west Africa. Questions of international politics could not enter things, as Ireland was considered by the Irish as being outside the Commonwealth, although the English considered they were in, while South-west, though considered by the Union as being within its borders, was not so regarded by the United Nations. Oom Paul, after trying to get to the bottom of this crystal-clear definition of the situation, produced another bottle of Cape brandy from the boot of his car, and said talking English always made his throat dry.

Later on the party grew silent, a member breaking into song occasionally. The driver kept turning his head to shout at me about the beauties of the scenery, but as he only remembered the best bits after we had passed them, this was unprofitable. Eventually we arrived at a farm, where our dusty and dishevelled appearance aroused no comments. We were fed and cleaned up by a gang of grinning houseboys, who seemed unmoved by the roars of their boss. I slept like a dead man, had an early breakfast, and went off loaded with presents, after bidding good-bye to my hosts, who were in no condition for oratory.

* * * *

Back at our camp there was plenty to do, arranging for supplies eastward. None of us thought much of a run across the Kalahari Thirstland, but it would be very foolish to under-assess the chances of failure. It was necessary to plan a reserve objective in the event of a breakdown, and opinions were very much divided on that point. I was glad when Bob and Luke started an argument on a side-issue.

Luke had been bragging about the exploits of the Thirstland Trekkers in the old days. The people who opened up the western

states in America were always within range of water, he claimed, so that their task was not comparable. In Africa, he added, the Americans would not have achieved much.

Bob rose to this bait, in great style. "What about Stanley?" he shouted.

"Stanley who?"

"Stanley, the great journalist."

"Oh, a journalist."

"Yes. Ever heard of Stanley Falls and Stanleyville? He was the man who explored Abyssinia, Tanganyika, and the Congo. He rescued Livingstone. He rescued Emin Pasha."

"Kind of superman, with a typewriter, too."

"In those days if you wanted to write you used your own blood."

"That's what I like," said Luke. "The Americans have got to be dramatic. Anyone else would have used ink. It's like the bioscope. The hero never takes a bus or a trackless tram like us. He rings up the F.B.I. and gets a helicopter."

Bob returned to the attack. "Ever heard of the Camcron-Clarke Kalahari expedition, about thirty or forty years ago? They proved that *this was one of the oldest inhabited parts of the world.*"

"I could have told them that without them spending all that money on fares," said Luke.

"There was Renders, who discovered Zimbabwe," said Bob. "Another American. He married the daughter of your Pretorius." Luke was impressed at last. "I know all about her. She had seventeen wounds on her body from Zulu assegais. Your Renders must have been quite a man after all."

"I'm glad you think so. What about Herbert Lang, of the American Museum of Natural History? He found the stone drawings in the Transvaal, fifty thousand years old. It was an international sensation."

"Not where I was, it wasn't."

"There were Americans on the Jameson Raid."

"You know what the burghers did with them? We put them in gaol, and they had to pay thousands to get free. Ask John here, he knows Jameson's nephew."

"If Patton had been in charge of that raid, all that would have been left of the Boers would have been a cloud of dust."

"Yes, at your rear."

These arguments gave a spice to the journey.

By now we had perfected a technique of handling instruments, setting up tripods and running out cable at speed, while the boys knew the exact moment to get the tea billy boiling. These pauses for tea or coffee are essential with this kind of life, making a welcome

break in the routine of a day that must end shortly after sunset. We were usually asleep by nine p.m., and up at first light.

It was time to strike away to the east. The Kwando and Okavongo could not be crossed, and it would be necessary to beat further south than was at first intended. It was a matter of seasons, and of no importance to the results we would obtain, or fail to obtain.

The nearer we approached Bechuanaland the redder became the landscape. The political boundaries are not natural ones, and in this part of the world, where one can make a run of eight hundred miles without seeing a white man, the lines on maps are recognizable as abstractions and conveniences.

* * * *

Peggy commented on the quiet lives we were leading, when I was writing up the daily journal and asking her for anything fresh that had happened. "I've never gone to bed so early, or got up so early in my life," she said, "I always thought exploration was full of thrills and excitement every day."

"It is in the books and movies," I told her, "but in practice it's nearly as dull as a war. The war looks exciting, too, in books, but at the time it's wearisome. That's how everyone looks so old when they come out of the services. It's the lack of thrills that ages people, the dull, plodding, disappointing routine, and doing things you don't want to do and can't see any point in. If we could have swaggered about in fancy uniforms with medals it would have been different. As it is, every time you go to a veterans' get-together, you think of an old-age-pensioners' outing."

"Maybe the thrills will come later on," said Peggy, "When you get back and can brag about where you've been and what you've done."

"People won't let you talk about where you've been. They don't want to hear it, not in conversation, anyway. They can take a bit of it on radio and television. They don't want to hear about how wonderful you are, but how wonderful they are."

Bob chimed in. "The bigger crumbs they are, the more they like to hear how wonderful they are, too."

Luke said, "If you get a medal now, you have to say 'I only did what everyone else would have done!' If they ever give me one, I'll tell them it's only what I deserve. What about you getting some for us, anyway? Don't the Russians give away some fancy ones studded with gold and jewels? They are the ones to get. I don't want any more of those iron ore jobs they dished out with the rations. Of course, none of us could compete with Bob when it comes to medals, no doubt?"

"I have a drawer full of them at home," said Bob. "Can't remember what they are all for, now."

"If you like I'll recommend you to be made Heroes of Labour," I told them.

"Sounds more suitable for a maternity hospital chief," said Luke.

"Hereros of Labour!" said Bob.

"Flippancy will get you nowhere," said Peggy. "The only medals you lot will get will be those you strike yourselves. The Order of the Golden Bontebok, or some such. The trouble with you is that you never take anything seriously, so people don't take you seriously, either. If you went back with a long report that nobody could understand they would think it must be something good."

"That's what the doctors did with me in hospital," said Bob. "They stood around and grunted at me for a bit, and then used a lot of Latin names. One man said it looked like a diplodocus in the abadabs, and the other one gave an umph and said there were clear indications of a polarised fracture of the pterodactyl with refractive complications. I felt I was really getting my money's worth."

The natives were amused by our nightly drill of smearing insect repellent ointment on our faces, necks, and arms, the gymnastics with mosquito nets, and the careful search of bedding tolls to eject intruders. Sometimes they sang songs about us. After listening to one of these close harmony efforts, which sounded a lot better than the radio at home—negroes have splendid voices—Luke offered to translate, but I stopped him. "Don't tell me. Next thing you'll be telling us our native names. I don't want to hear about it in case they've named me Belly That Shakes in the Wind. Let them have their fun. It sounds good."

Peggy was very good at standing up to the strange insects, but occasionally she let out a yell at something particularly large or horrific, in tropical colours. She drove something out one night that was so big she said for a moment she thought it was trying to open one of our tins.

"Maybe it was a praying mantis," I said.

"Let him say his prayers somewhere else."

That was the trouble with the tropics. The gorgeous scenery and the strange sights and sounds were all very well, but there were the ever-present tiny pests, at war with us, and making really deep sleep impossible. Perhaps that is one good reason for the lack of energy in these latitudes, and the frequent habit of sleeping through the afternoon. In the long winters back home there were no insects to worry about, so despite the pall of smoke over the industrial towns a man could sleep sound and rise refreshed for the new day. There was also need to be on the alert for wild animals, which must affect

sleep to some extent, just as a woman's sleep is much lighter after she has a child and is on the alert, subconsciously, for an unusual sound.

The other difference I noticed was a waning of interest in ideas and abstractions, and a concentration on the details of living. This was probably a good thing, as it helped us to keep our eyes open and watchful of what was going on around. It is dangerous to get lost in a book when something may be creeping up on you from behind.

CHAPTER X

CAPRIVI ZIPFEL

The uncivilized Strip ; snake-bite, honey-bees and wild life.

IN the days when the rising power of German industry was beginning to make itself felt, and the mighty resources of North America were still unrealized in Europe, the Caprivi Zipfel came into existence. This is a strip of land, 300 miles long from Andara on the Okavongo in Central Africa to Kasangula, on the way to Livingstone, in Rhodesia. The strip is narrow, a day's drive across, but it once possessed great strategic possibilities. Count Caprivi, the German imperialist, saw the strip as a link between German West and the wide and empty lands of the Zambesi. Caprivi saw the chance of a solid German bloc, uniting Tanganyika, Rhodesia, part of Bechuanaland, and German West. With better luck the Germans might have been successful. Rhodes put an end to this project, laying his shadow across Matabeleland and the Boer Republics, sending British settlers into the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and blocking every German move with one of his own.

The Strip is malarial, uncivilized, and unsurveyed. If it is not inaccessible, it is difficult to get at. The first native commissioner was mauled by a lioness. Others had strange adventures. The Caprivi was first flown across by the S. African pilots Stone and Blake in 1934. It is not a place for a crash landing. There are hippos, lions, wild elephants, and twenty-foot pythons. There are few whites in the 7,000 square miles of the Strip, and there is no immediate likelihood of more. The western portion of the Caprivi is officially under the South-west Africa administration, but because of its remoteness the eastern half of the strip comes under the Commissioner for Native Affairs of the Union of South Africa.

One might imagine that Kasangula, where the frontiers of four countries are squared off in the arbitrary manner of military surveyors—N. Rhodesia, S. Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, S.W. Africa—would be a flourishing town, but it is a mere outpost, sending skins to Rhodesia in exchange for goods.

One cannot help admiring the few whites who live out here, for the place has always been a death-trap. Until just about the time the first plane flew over the strip, there had been no law. Nobody was

sent there, except an occasional police officer from Bechuanaland, looking things over and making a report to officials of another country, at Windhoek. The Bechuanaland police, accustomed to camel treks across the desert and the big game area round Lake Ngami, were able to stand the rigours of the Caprivi better than anyone else. The first officials sent in from the west were killed by the natives or died of fever. All the German explorers who went here in the old days were killed or had to run for it. A few police posts were set up by the Germans, but when the reliefs arrived they usually found the occupants dead.

We were not worried about the natives, but scared of tsetse. Even if transport broke down, we could hang out indefinitely. Knowing the geography of the region, we were thrice armed. We would know, within limits, where we were going. The navigator always has the advantage when trouble starts. Unlike previous explorers, we were resolved not to pay for help and be bled white on the passage, but to enlist voluntary helpers, who would come with us on our own terms. This was our attitude of mind. We hoped that things would go well, but it is best to try and forecast all possibilities. The twentieth-century attitude of taking an immense cavalcade of gifts to the areas blank on the map would have seemed very strange to our forbears, and would have been unthinkable to the Dutch and English sailors who opened the world's shipping routes.

After wandering about the remote parts, we had evolved the idea that what the coloured folk really resented about the whites was not economic or political supremacy, but social barriers. Maybe that is the mainspring of the upsurge in Africa and Asia. If a man has more money or more guns than you there is little that the individual can do about it, and as he is accustomed to it he does not think much about it. But the social gulf that kept the best Indians out of the clubs in India, and which in most parts of Africa puts a man—and more important, his wife—in a position of forelock touching to the meanest white, this is felt at once by every man with a spark of manhood.

With our natives, our object was to treat them as our friends and to avoid any suggestion of condescension. I could never forget that no matter how shabby and lost an African may look in his European-style reach-me-downs, he is another man in his true panoply, proud and gay.

One of our Kaffirs was bitten by a snake, and we flocked round him like internees on their first day with a stethoscope. He began to turn grey as we worked on him with permanganate of potash crystals, tobacco juice, and knives, after the usual sucking. After a few scoops of brandy he seemed better, and soon recovered. We

looked anxiously at the teeth of the man who had sucked the wound, as in the case of a mamba the teeth of the sucker often turn green, so powerful is the venom. Nothing happened this time, perhaps because of the immediate permanganate wash and gargle.

This snake danger was nearly always present, although most snakes will not attack a man unless in fear of being trodden on. Scorpions were an added worry, as whenever we had to collect dry wood there was a fair chance of disturbing one. The Kaffirs get very careless after a few weeks of smooth journey, but the bush has a way of catching up on the unwary.

The fires were no trouble, north of the tree line, and when the blaze died down, the ashes retained their heat, and served as foundation for fresh fuel.

There is something exciting about a wood fire in the wilderness, with big steaks sizzling, and in the cool of the morning the smell of coffee and frying bacon. The air seems full of promise. When we first arrived in Africa we discovered the delights of a ride on the veld in the early morning, with splendid vistas of mountains in the distance. This must have been a great joy to the Boer settlers of the old days. Is it a wonder that they are nostalgic for the past and the scent of freedom? Machinery has taken such simple joys from us, but they are all the sweeter when come by unawares.

We were getting more practice at skinning and quartering meat, and learning how to keep it. We now searched carefully for spoor before pitching camp, in case we were on a game trail, and the hurricane lamps were functioning as well as my pocket dynamo.

The best hours of the day were those of the early morning, and the sundowner period, when the heat of the day was dying, and battles could be refought. We were beginning to sort out the meanings of the night noises. The laugh of the hyena and the booming roar of the lion were easy enough, but there was a good deal of similarity between the noise of the wild dog and the zebra. One of the troubles about camp life in the bush is that the game one shoots attracts unwelcome visitors.

There were arguments about the animals we saw, and even about those we ate. We always let Luke have the last word, but that took a lot of reaching sometimes. The gemsbok, sable antelope, and kudu may be simple enough, but I could not see much difference between duikers, steenbok, reebok, and klipspringer. When in doubt I called an animal a klipspringer, liking this name best. With the carnivora I was quite at home. I did not care how long a man had been in Africa, if he told me a cheetah was a leopard, or vice versa. The shape of the head is quite distinctive, and their behaviour is miles apart. I doubt if there are any cheetahs in the areas

we visited, as the conditions would not favour them. About birds I was always uncertain, and never discovered the difference between a francolin and a bush partridge, for instance, although this will be ABC to bird-watchers.

Kudu was the best game for biltong, and as much as forty or fifty pounds can be obtained from a big bull. This biltong retails in Africa in the towns at six to seven shillings a pound. Our methods of making biltong were far from hygienic. We did not know how to cut up a beast in the proper way, and if water was short the meat had to go dirty, hung up in the bush on a thorn tree, and thus collecting all kinds of noxious insects and their eggs, and small birds trailing the insects. Then our salt was not first quality for the job. The strips looked fair enough, but who was to say what dangers they concealed? Maybe living rough provides its own compensations in the way of resistance to trifling complaints. Indigestion was certainly a rare trouble with our crowd. One might have expected the natives to be scared of carrying meat loads on their heads through elephant grass, infested by who knew what, but this never bothered them. The African does not meet trouble halfway.

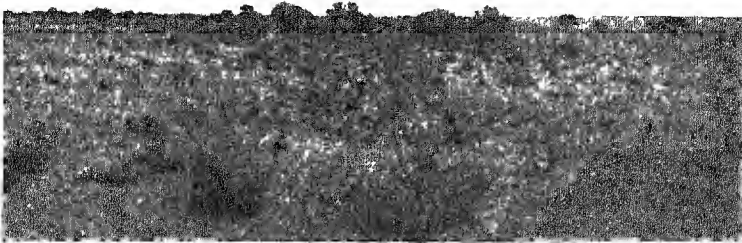
The Caprivi natives suffer badly with malaria, and there can be few of them without an enlarged spleen. This makes them, like their cousins in East Africa, very susceptible to blows in the stomach. Their heads are, of course, as hard as ivory, like their feet. As for the tsetse problem, this is serious. I have been told that the only way to solve this business is to burn a mile of bush between the infected area and the surround, as the flies cannot cover such a distance. There has already been a tremendous slaughter of game and cattle in the effort to deal with tsetse, but there appears to be a division of opinion as to whether wild animals are the worst carriers. The evidence suggests that tsetse will survive without the blood of large animals. If that is true, then the laboratory and not the gun must supply the answer. The experience of Tanganyika suggests the chemical answer to be the right one, as in some parts there is no game. A man visiting there finds himself bitten by swarms of tsetses, nasty deep bites that do not heal for weeks, even if there are no worse effects. Aerial spraying has been tried in a few places, but can hardly be a hundred per cent effective in Africa. There is too much ground to cover, with farms of ten thousand *morgen* and upwards.

Peggy got herself lost in the bush one day, and said it was a terrifying business, although it did not last long. She could have fired her pistol, and that would have brought an answering shot from the camp, but was determined to avoid this. It was only when she crossed her own track that she began to get doubtful. The bush

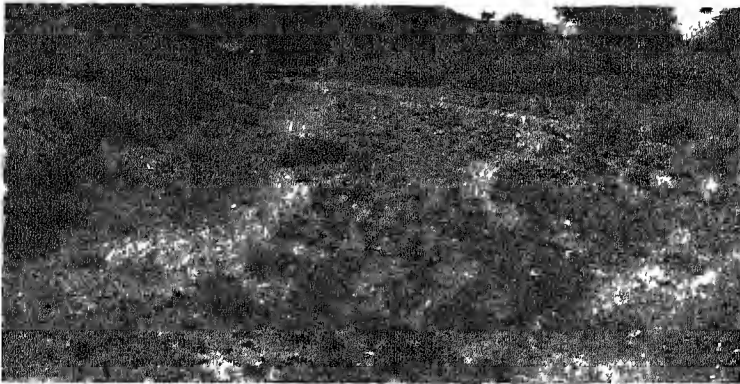
looks so much the same in all directions, once the certainty of direction is lost. The friendly appearance dies slowly, and becomes sinister. Normally none of us went more than a few hundred yards from the camp at any time, except in open country. As she was wandering about trying to trace her path, the sun began to sink. This must have been a bad moment. A thorn bush or small *spruit* that looks an easy landmark from the south is not so easy from the north or east. She thought of climbing a tree, but there might be a python up there, or a serval. We had a drill for this kind of situation, which was to sit down and smoke a cigarette, so that calmness would come. In the stillness she thought she heard a faint sound in the distance, but was not sure if it were human. Then came a very welcome sound—the clanging of the brass bell, alarming the small rodents and birds, and sending the small buck crashing in the distance. The silent forest was really very much alive, waiting for the dark. When she reached us she seemed quite composed, but it taught her a lesson—not to venture out into thick country without her Air Raid Warden whistle, slung on a neck lanyard. As is usual with people who lose direction, she had been moving in a circle. Civilized humans seem to have a kind of torque that operates like this.

One morning we were bitten by wild honey-bees, who bore no resemblance to those of Britain. In Africa all the insects are more aggressive than those of the temperate zones, and the honey-bees blitzed us with great efficiency. They go for the eyes, or seem to do so, and we were in too much of a hurry to get away to deal with the bites as we should. The stings left violent patches, and were extremely painful. They cleared up in three days, but one or two stings left little bags of irritated skin behind, and I used needles on these, with permanganate of potash, to prevent an unsightly growth. There were also squeaking beetles, with a nasty smell. What these were I could not say, nor could anyone else. We put one in a matchbox in case we were candidates for a gold medal of the insect world. There was no enthusiasm in our ranks for the six-inch caterpillars and monstrous centipedes that crawled around, especially as the centipedes could bite, and left nasty sores behind if handled.

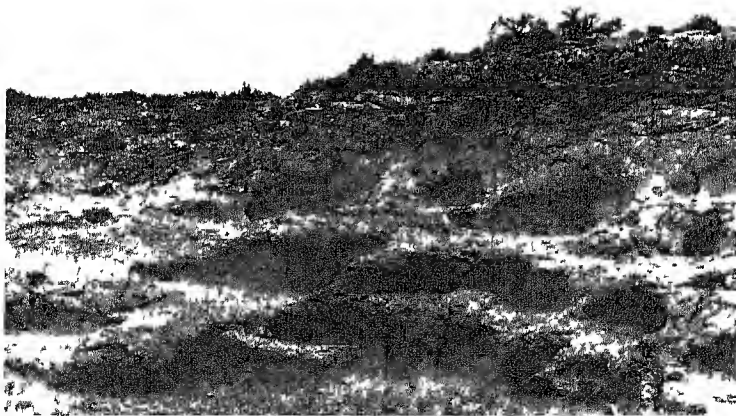
The tall termite towers sometimes concealed snakes, and we had to carry forked sticks, the longer the better, as the cobras can spit their venom six feet or more, with great accuracy. Once a snake's head is trapped by the fork, it is easy to despatch him with a stone or machete. We killed anything that we found, the natives hacking and clubbing with gusto whenever they got a chance. It was impossible to sit anywhere without first considering the place. An army of ants



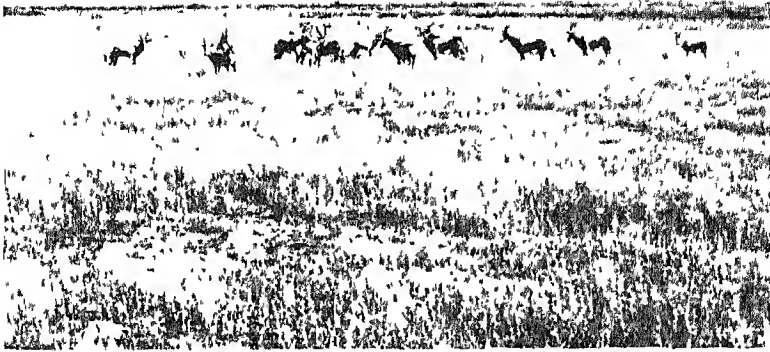
Kalahari wasteland



Dried river bed, Caprivi



Kalahari Lick, Nossob River bed



Bontebok



Gnus

might be on the way, or the web of some queer-looking spider be across a stone.

The grass was of a dozen different colours in the ant-hill area, all shades of yellow, green, and brown. The earth was khaki, fawn, or pale red. I sometimes searched around for a trace of blue or yellow soapy soil, that tell-tale indication, but there was nothing there. All the bushes had thorns, maybe a necessity for survival with so many antelope and vegetarian game about.

A few water-holes held a white, milky fluid, but this tasted as good as anything transparent in the area, after boiling, and treating with alum. I tried to arrange a system of sand-filters whenever we had time, but this was considered fussiness by the others.

Flies followed us all day until we discovered that they were apparently working on a system of twenty flies per person, who must stick with that person all day—or so we imagined. At all events, when a man had killed his quota he was left in comparative peace for the rest of the day. This killing was difficult, as the African flies are extremely wary and persistent, like old soldiers who have fought a dozen campaigns. The natives do not worry about flies in the way that a European does, perhaps because they are so accustomed to them, but it is wrong to think that the flies do not settle on the blacks.

We scared a troop of baboons one morning. They were coming over the crest of a kopje, or they would have heard us long before. They were led by a grizzled veteran, and two professor-like creatures—boffin baboons—were turning over rocks and roots, searching for scorpions and ants eggs and suchlike. Some of the babies seemed very human-like. The mothers carried their children on their backs, native-fashion. The troop looked so human that we burst out laughing, and the noise made them stop and stare. They staggered off down the other side, looking most upset and irritated, screaming imprecations at each other, the bolder and younger ones hanging slightly behind to prove they were not really worried. The whole show looked like a factory outing being chased off National Trust property by the “parkies.”

Jacobus pointed out a grey honey-bird that would, he said, lead us to a store of honey. This bird was small, and not unlike a humming-bird. We did not follow him, as we had had enough of honey-bees for the time being.

Peggy thought she saw something watching us from the dense bush, and took a shot at whatever it was. Later on we saw vultures over a spot in the bush beyond us, which may have meant a hit, but the thornbush was too thick for investigation. There were many wild fig trees around—wild figs that had strangled some other tree

in order to make their way, and which themselves were being destroyed by the burrowing termites. These termites were everywhere. They could not bore through the canvas bucksail or the rubber ground-sheets, but they did their best, sometimes raising a small kopje of their own in the night underneath our gear.

There were grasshoppers as big as little sparrows, and lop-sided bats. I noticed a praying mantis, and Peggy saw a chameleon on a rock. There were thousands of ticks in the bush, waiting on the ends of thorns to drop on anything that went by.

We were glad to eat some wild figs, as a fortnight is as long as men can go on a purely meat diet without dysentery, and our fruit juice was carefully rationed. In maintaining a balanced diet my honey beer came in handy. The proper way to make this is to soak some Kaffir corn, and bury it in the ground until it starts some pallid sprouts. The corn is then dried in the sun and ground in the long native mortar or similar container. A paste of honey, water, and yeast is made and water to required strength added to the mixture. The liquid should be left to ferment for four days, when it is ready for drinking. A longer fermentation makes the stuff very powerful. Had we made a long stay anywhere I would have tried my hand at a rough spirit, the secret of which I had learned in Ireland.

These little experiments were building up our self-confidence. Our language was slowly changing, too. We used words like *kloof* (ravine), *scherm* (stockade), and *vlei* (marsh or marsh pool) without thinking, despite our criticism of Luke's ideas and his defence of Afrikaans and all Afrikaner ways. Sometimes the Afrikaans word seemed more apt, like *skellum* instead of rascal. Bob and Luke were always at hammer and tongs about language. Bob maintained that the survival of minority language groups was a crime against civilization, and a bar to the unification of the West. The Cornish, he said, had had the wit to let their language die. In Ireland, Wales, and South Africa the national languages had survived without even a literature to justify themselves, while in the north of Scotland he had come upon another barbarous tongue, which he put on a level with Iroquois and Navajo.

"Look at the Balkans," said Bob. "About ten different countries, and not ten pairs of pants among the lot. Yet to hear them yabbling at Lake Success you'd imagine they had something to be proud of."

Resenting the comparison with Red Indians, Luke said, "I suppose you imagine what you speak is English?"

"Listen, brother. I speak good American, which is a modification of the English the Pilgrim Fathers spoke."

"Yes, I heard it on the bioscope," said Luke, with a grin.

"If you don't like our movies, why do you go to see them? As a

matter of fact, the American movie has been a great civilizing influence. It showed the women of the world how they should be living, and that starts things popping. Your Afrikaner women could do with a few modern kitchens, but you wouldn't agree with that, oh no. Your idea is that women should be slaves of the men. I've seen plenty of that. Low life on the High Veld."

"Take your American girl away from her fancy kitchen, and what could she do?"

"You'd be surprised. Don't forget her grandmother may have been a covered wagon girl."

"And don't forget it was the Dutch who built New York."

"And the English who chiselled them out of it," said Peggy, breaking up the bout.

Luke knew a lot about the great hunters of the past, and his knowledge and practical experience was a great help. He told us of Pretorius, who had shot six elephants in thirty seconds, and had been carried a thousand miles through enemy territory to join the British forces in 1914, with a broken leg, impressing native bearers to carry him across jungle and mountain. The fantastic thing was that the authorities rejected him, after this epic. Life is like that. Ulysses, after ten years of wandering, might today expect a summons for non-payment of rates from the Ithaca Town Council awaiting his return. Nothing could stop Pretorius, however, and the two D.S.O's and C.M.G. the British bestowed on him were only a moderate recognition of his exploits.

At night we lay under the giraffe-like Southern Cross and listened to Luke's stories of Selous and Coen Brits and the Bantu legends he had learned from his nurse. It was the unwritten law of the veld, said Luke, that men must help each other, even if it meant a long and dangerous journey, away from one's objective. Every white man, he said, in Africa, was an aristocrat by reason of his colour. It was incumbent on him to behave like one, without thought of reward or prestige. Such things were for cities, where they bred meanness of soul. We had to listen to Luke, because he carried out his principles one hundred per cent.

Luke had a theory that the boasted keen sight of the bush animals was a myth, and we tried to test it. When we kept very still animals rarely noticed us. The exception was the baboon, but the baboon often takes to high ground for his observations, just as a man would. Our impression was that a human being could see better than any animal. With hearing it was another story. The Kaffirs seemed to have better hearing than the whites, for they were able to converse in low tones with each other when walking away in opposite directions, with loads balanced on their heads. A dog could hear sounds

beyond our range, and the cats seemed to have a sixth sense of danger around. The birds of prey are supposed to have very keen eyesight, but it was noticeable that they circled many times around a dead beast, as if uncertain, before they settled with a clumsy flapping.

If he had an advantage in hearing and bushcraft, the Kaffir had none in withstanding hunger and thirst. It is the same in the Himalayas. It is always the porters who give up when things get rough, although their acclimatization problem is so much simpler. With one notable exception, in 1953, it has always been the white men who are left alone to plod on, although these are often small men of middle age, who spend their time, of necessity, at a typewriter or in trains between lecture dates, while in the temperate zones. Income tax has made exploration a sedentary job. On the slopes of Nanga Parbat a man's chief concern may not be where to plant the flag, but where to write his cable.

CHAPTER XI

KALAHARI

A desert debunked ; the Bushmen ; Kalahari's future ; in the swamps ; about big game hunting.

THE Kalahari Desert, as it is called, is a big arid zone occupying the southern, central, and western parts of Bechuanaland. The Desert spreads west and south of Ngamiland as far as Latitude 27° South.

Even today the Kalahari, as I shall call it, because I do not regard the area as a true desert, is still largely unexplored.

I went there with the idea at the back of my mind of "debunking" the place as a desert, and as the years go by and the Kalahari is opened up people will wonder that it ever was so regarded.

There are rolling sand belts everywhere, with limestone outcrops. Many areas are wooded, like park lands, with camelthorn and other trees.

There is some fair scenery in the north-west area, in the Okavongo delta, but this is not regarded as part of the Kalahari.

I will anticipate, and say that water can be found in the limestone areas all over the Kalahari, in little pockets, at depths as low as thirty feet, and rarely at lower depths than a hundred feet. There are several underground rivers.

Part of the Kalahari has been declared a game reserve, and the last stronghold of some types of fauna. The desert is the home of the yellow-skinned Bushmen, the aboriginal inhabitants of Africa, who live as they did thousands of years ago, on the flesh of the game they hunt down on foot, supplemented by roots and wild fruit.

The Bushmen have big hindquarters, and can go a long time without water, like camels. The lions of the Kalahari had, we found, the same capacity. No matter how rotten meat may be, the Bushmen will eat it, like hyenas.

The atmosphere is very dry, and this helps to tone down the temperature, which sometimes ran up to 150° F. With cloudless skies every day the strong sunlight and dry air produce a kind of nervous, high-strung, feeling. The Bushmen have a look of extreme alertness in their eyes that only appears in Europe on the faces of some illiterates.

The seasonal winds from the west coast of Africa start in August, and last for seven weeks, sweeping the country with heat and clouds

of sand and dust. There is malaria all over the low altitude areas, and what with their attacks and the peculiar atmospheric conditions, and the impossibility of a settled community without adequate water supplies, it is surprising that the inhabitants are as peace-loving as they are.

The Bushmen have the eye for ground of black trackers in Australia and New Zealand. They can discern the presence of game and the direction of flight by signs invisible to a white man. They can find their way home by some unerring method from a saltpan or sandy waste, with no bearings in sight. I have myself found that this instinct for direction is dormant in men, and can be immeasurably improved and developed by practice. I think it must be a kind of subconscious memory, as I found the Bushmen were worse than the white men once they were taken a long way from their proper haunts. It is probably the same thing with dogs and cats. With nothing to think about and no books or ideas or memory associations to clog up observations, I see no reason why a mental picture of a scene should not be reconstructed in the mind, with any familiar object acting as clue.

The Bushmen language is a system of clicks, and in general sounds a bit like the barking of baboons interspersed with clicks and clops. The Zulu clicking and hissing is quite different. In the olden days the Boers shot the Bushmen down like game, and there have been proposals, even in high assemblies, that the Bushmen should be classified as such to facilitate extermination. Seeing that many of them had horrible diseases and as they are considered untameable by some observers, this proposal was not as barbarous as it sounds today. In the tropics remedies tend to be as drastic as the diseases they cure, and what could not be put forward at an international conference in the temperate zone sounds like cold common sense in the jungle or desert.

* * * *

What of the opening up of the Kalahari? It is not a new idea. Professor Schwarz had put out the theory that the Okavongo, Zambesi, and Kwando rivers once ran south through the Kalahari, and that as a result of the drying up of the old channels the Kalahari arid zone was now marching south, like the Sahara. His idea was to empty the swamps to the north into the Makarikari depression and into Lake Ngami, a hundred miles to the south of the swamps. The new inland sea would bring in its train heavier precipitation, and the new water resources would mean a vast area for cultivation. The Thirstland Redemption Association was formed, and the active

interest of Smuts and Reitz was obtained. In discussing these projects it must be remembered that the Vaal-Harts scheme, which cost the Union of South Africa six millions sterling, created a vast inland sea and did a tremendous amount of good, with a living for thousands of settlers.

These plans had been dropped, and it can now be said that there is no chance of making a permanent increase in the precipitation figures. But the possibility of cutting a swamp channel from the north remains, to run the water down the old channel into the Kalahari. Professor Debenham from England had visited these swamps two years before my trip, and had told me something of the transport and other difficulties.

Petrol consumption is very heavy. The authorities insist on two lorries in case the first one breaks down. The radiators need frequent refills, and driving is burdensome. Yet when the flood waters come down from the Okavongo in the north, having taken months to break out of the natural reed dams, the stream runs down as far as Maun, an administration centre.

All the way along the flood waters from the swamps there is a great profusion of bird life—duck, geese, pheasant, partridge, guinea fowl and teal. There is no need to shoot for the pot. A vehicle will kill enough under the wheels to feed a small party, so tame are the birds.

It is the same with the big game in the swamps proper. They have not the sense to run away, being so unused to firearms. The buffalo were safe, as I did not have a .500 double Jeffery, and I do not recommend tackling these animals without such a weapon. Unless he is shot first time at the point of the shoulder, a buffalo can bring an expedition to a rapid close. If he is hit anywhere else but his vital spot he will tackle anything or anybody. I know many people have shot buffalo with lighter weapons, and lived to tell the tale—but let them get on with it. I was told of what happened to one official who tackled an elephant with a .303, and how many times he screamed when he was battered against a tree (twice) and what he looked like when it was all over.

On the swamps, which cover many hundreds of square miles, travel is by Makoro dugout canoes, with ten paddlers to each dugout. The black paddlers sing as they work, and seem to get strength from the presence of the white man. They remind me of children, singing to keep away the fear of the dark and the unknown. The paddlers demand meat to fill their bellies and give them something to brag about when they return home. Reflected glory again.

I was anxious to get out of the swamps. I was scared of malaria and sleeping sickness, and the horrible mephitic odours of who

knows what? There are stories of strange people who live beyond the swamps, of cave dwellers and treasures and ruins. But maybe the blacks invent these to tempt the traveller to stay longer and fill their bellies.

Frightening stories are told of the terrific kick of an elephant gun, or the giant .577, which will knock the biggest animal on its hunkers, but an ex-soldier would find these weapons simple enough to handle. Certainly if a heavy gun is held loosely to the shoulder there will be a startling reaction, but these weapons are not meant for novices.

Good all-purpose guns are the Martini-action Parker-Hale .303 and the BSA model E .303, a converted military rifle, a five-shot magazine, hard-hitting job with a Mauser action. The advantage of these rifles is that ammunition is plentiful and cheap.

Colonel Laurens Van der Post recommended me the 7 mm. Mannlicher and 6.5 mm. fitted with Schonhauer peep-sight, and these weapons are very good. For buffalo the Jeffery .500 double-barrelled express is a good job. A d/b should always be reloaded after firing, of course, in case a wounded animal is playing "possum" or recovers.

Lion need something like a .36 calibre, or the .416. Shooting these animals will always be a risky business, as if they are not hit in a vital spot they can charge at about 40 m.p.h., getting up speed at once, like a domestic cat. Talk about getting grey hairs!

Leopards are the worst animals to hunt, as these big cats will go for a man every time if driven into a hide, and are very clever at tree camouflage and maintaining silence.

In lion country it is necessary to build a zareba of thorn bush or similar obstruction, at night. Fire is supposed to keep animals away, but the hyenas sometimes have the nerve to come in close and bite people. And a bite from these powerful jaws can be a serious business.

Snakes can be kept at bay at night by a rope round a tent or sleeping bag—a rope impregnated with disinfectant, carbolic for preference. Snakes hate the smell, and dislike crossing a rope, for some reason. A trench might do, as the African witch-doctors use this method, digging a channel around a hut and filling it with strong-smelling powders that they carry in rhinoceros horn containers.

It is difficult to say how some animals manage to survive in Thirstland, where there is no obvious water supply. Yet a lot of game seems to prefer the arid zone to the bush. Perhaps the *tsamma* melons are the answer. Certainly the desert animals, like the Bushmen with their huge buttocks which seem to store up moisture like camels, can go for long periods without drinking, in extremely high temperatures.

The old hands warned me that if caught unawares in open country, and unarmed, the best thing to do in the presence of a wild animal is to remain absolutely still, not moving a muscle. This is good advice, and is really just the common sense of any woodman or gamekeeper anywhere, or bird-watcher. This advice came in handy on one or two occasions, as it is a counsel of perfection to say "Be armed and alert all the time."

Safaris are still being organized by private hunters in various parts of Africa, and in Northern Rhodesia by the government. Near the Luangwa river there are four camps, of thatched huts and grass shelters, with refrigerators, hot water and radio laid on. Parties of four go to these camps, paying fifteen hundred U.S. dollars for each person for a three weeks' stay. A hunter can shoot one elephant and three buffalo, but there is plenty of other game. Trophies are despatched abroad by the hunt organizers. Rich big-game hunters from the States fly in to Livingstone and go on by charter aircraft.

The Luangwa valley is remote enough, and there will be no lack of game, as the number of hunters is restricted to twelve a year. Mr. Reodon Rodway, a former architect, "lays on" these safaris for the government, and very successful they have been. It is the habit in some quarters to scoff at what they like to call "plush-lined safaris," but no man who is prepared to face a wounded buffalo needs to justify himself. As for the cost, it is trifling compared with the 25,000 dollars some big fish men pay for the chance of catching a big marlin off the Bahamas.

The thirst for trophies may seem old-fashioned, but it is a real thing to many people. I have never been afflicted with it, but at my flat in London visitors sometimes say, "Did you bring back any curios from——?" and I feel their disappointment. I was brought up in a house full of Japanese trick-boxes, Chinese screens, Malayan *krises*, and shrunken heads from the forests of Ecuador—the trophies, all useless, of generations of shipmasters. As a child I always thought visitors were bored or depressed by this evidence of a roving life. To me the tradesman or the professional man in his orbit of routine was a valuable contribution to society, perhaps more valuable than the members of my own family, tanned with tropic suns, who began conversations with "That reminds me of a night in Valparaiso, the night we busted open the gaol. . . ."

There is a lot to be said for the new school of camera-hunters, who study animal life and take photographs, which are their only trophies. Paul Selby, the American mining engineer, invented this kind of sport. He towed his car through the Crocodile River to an area where Portuguese half-breeds in charge of Shangaan natives used to

raid from over the frontier, and got the first pictures of lion from a car.

Hunting big game is an expensive pastime today, and governments charge heavily for licences in many areas. Then there is the cost of buying an armoury and the various permits and import charges. Some of the hunters seem to lack that instinctive knowledge of firearms that one might assume to be essential, but that does not stop them. Bushcraft means a lot.

CHAPTER XII

WATER PROBLEMS

*In Windhoek ; Bob's eastward run ; into the Kalahari ; the aborigines ;
through the red waste ; we lose our water-dump.*

WATER was the problem in a long-distance Thirstland crossing. I had spent hours over the business. In the Namib and further north the distance between wells and supplies had never been as great as in the Kalahari. It is all a matter of bulk. There is no metal that is heat-resistant and light-weight enough to be practical. To keep water fresh and cool in metal containers requires great insulation, whether of asbestos, wool, or similar material. All that means extra weight. There seemed faint possibilities in CO₂, but that also proved impractical. I devised a container of aluminium, with water jackets and insulation in series, and gravity feeds, but when we showed this to an engineer in sketch, he pointed out a number of flaws.

The solution seemed to be water dumps ahead of route. The air might be a possibility, but the expense of a drop would be too great. It was probable that we would strike water somewhere at a point near the surface, but we could not rely on hope. We could cut down on the personnel, but that would mean a loss of efficiency in survey, and that was our primary object.

There was no lack of water in the Tati triangle and in the area west of the Crocodile River, that was something to be thankful for. Bob offered to take a full load of water through the usual routes east of Windhoek, and make a solo run, with a couple of Kaffirs to help, leaving his cargo south of Ngamiland at a well-marked point. There was a danger that Bushmen would steal the supplies, and it would be impossible to leave a Kaffir in charge, we thought. The Hereros, however, offered to stay until the main party joined them, and also work at protecting the containers from the sun. Bob would return with his lorry, and bring fresh food supplies, oil and petrol, and a few spares from Windhoek, to rejoin us at our assembly point, where we could load up to full capacity in the sure knowledge that our load would decrease daily, and that the tracks and trails to the desert were fairly good.

We made good time to the capital. Windhoek is a real German city. I had hoped to see Colonel Hoogenhuit, the Administrator,

who had been helpful in the past, but he had been sent to the Netherlands as Ambassador. Bob and I were on our own now, the Hereros standing guard on the transport, in turn, after we had finished with the garage job.

It was pleasant to be bathed and clean and pressed again. As usual in the tropics, our hair had grown with great speed, and for a short time we needed two shaves a day. Windhoek is about six thousand feet up, and we found it cool, although other people were complaining about the heat.

We visited a cinema, resembling any ritzy *Kino* in Munich or Hamburg, and were surprised to find that the *Queen* was not played at the end of the performance. Our misgivings on this point were heightened when we found ourselves in *Goeringstrasse* next morning.

Grey-faced people from Germany, in grey suits, drank coffee at little tables in the many cafés. They searched our faces anxiously as if eager for a link with their homeland. The German ranchers and farmers of the region were very rich, we were told. In nearly every house both man and wife had an American car, and the place was busy with trucks carrying new pianos and refrigerators from Germany to the fashionable suburbs. In the shops there were goods from every part of the world but Britain. That is an exaggeration, but a first impression. In the cafés, eating cream cakes, were middle-aged men explaining to each other just how Germany had lost the war. They had retained the Central European habit of looking over their shoulders before they spoke. It was all intensely depressing.

We set off in the afternoon to visit the *Tintenpalast* and make our number with an official or two, but it was up a long hill, and the building itself a good way from the gates. We imagined the palaver there would be before we reached the right people, and the form-filling one associates with bureaucrats everywhere. Maybe we were doing the people there an injustice, but we turned back. At the bottom of the hill there was a place where we could get long *steins* of amber lager, iced. Over these we decided that to interview authority might lead us into more trouble. There is the inevitable clash of viewpoint between the man in the office and the man on the road. I have noticed that even the best administrators tend to magnify the importance of the papers they are handling, as this is connected with their own prestige. It is perhaps best to do things first, then apologize and ask for guidance. The ingenuity of the office man in fitting unorthodox behaviour into his pattern can then be admired. Besides, a man who is apologetic to authority is in the right kind of attitude, and will probably get a good reception. The unforgivable thing is to ignore the book of words and then go blithely on, without even a token obeisance. To the bureaucrat this is nearly as bad as

getting a question asked in the House of Commons, or asking for a hearing by the Grand Jury.

Bob pointed out that there was no need for both of us to make the eastward run. He had the maps, and two good compasses, besides being now a fair navigator in his own right by sun and stars. If he did not return in a week I could hire a search party, with the help of the estimable Mr. Zimmer, the local expert on desert crossings.

Bob, who had drawn the short straw, went off and I moved into the *Gross Herzog*, where I spent days of quiet splendour, waited on hand and foot by silent acolytes, writing up notes and dealing with a massive mail. Some of my correspondents told me to beware of the *Mau-Mau*, but as these were some thousands of miles to the north it hardly seemed to matter. Moreover, one of my friends at Oxford, whom I tried to initiate into the art of roof-climbing, was a Kikuyu chief. I thought this might guarantee immunity. One friend wrote to me about the Sahara. There was even a reference to "dropping in" on someone in Somaliland.

My days in Windhoek were fully employed, but I began to feel more and more like a fugitive from *Mittel-Europa*. On all sides there were nostalgic references to cafés and beer cellars and theatres of the old days, and the glories of music festivals and the 1936 Olympics. In their homes the Germans played their favourite records to each other, drank beer, and ate wonderful little sausages. On their shelves were works of Homeric size, and on their walls were calendars from firms in both major zones of Germany. Some of them collected butterflies, others stamps or animal skins. It was all charming and innocent, like a Japanese cherry-blossom celebration.

Bob made a good run and was back well ahead of schedule. He had made a fast traverse to southern Ngamiland, hitting the target right on the button, and leaving Jacobus in charge, with a machete. The going had been good, and well marked. There was far more traffic over the western part of the Kalahari than people imagined. He had met a man who took his family across regularly, through the police posts, to Mafeking, for a holiday in the Union. "Let's get back quickly," I told Bob. "They've started asking me how I spell my name. They'll be putting me up for the *Bruderbund* or something next."

"I thought that was an Afrikaner outfit?"

"No doubt you're right. Anyway, I don't want to become one of the Loyal Sons of Suction and Windhoek Windbreakers."

I asked Bob what he had seen on the run, but he was non-committal. "Nothing. Not a single Bushman. Nothing interesting. Trouble was keeping awake after the sun got high."

"No snakes, lions, or anything?"

"Not even a hyena. You could hear them laughing, though."

"What was the country like?"

"Red desert. Quite a bit of grass as you go north, though."

"Surely something must have been interesting?"

"Nearly had a collision on the way back. Other fellow was asleep, I think. We'd have looked well, crashing into each other miles from anywhere."

"You remind me of the junior reporter on his first job, a wedding. When he got back his boss asked him why he didn't phone in his piece. He said there was nothing to report, as the bride hadn't turned up. She'd run off with the best man."

"Trouble with these stunts is every time you expect things to happen it's as flat as English beer."

* * * *

We started off as a reunited team, full of confidence. We even made plans for a celebration at some uncertain date in the future. B50 punch, we decided, would be a suitable starter for the party (one quart of gin, one quart of rum, one can of grapefruit juice, one can of pineapple juice. Ice the mixture.).

Bob was in high spirits, and when Luke pointed out a secretary bird, bawled "Take a letter" at it. We went along at a great speed. The country on both sides of the frontier is flat and rolling, with excellent visibility. We were anxious to get well into Bechuanaland. Hanging about frontier areas is always attended by trouble. Deep enough in, it would be as difficult for people to reach us and order us out as it would be for us to reach our objectives. We wondered if similar considerations would have effect in Central Asia today. Everyone thought in terms of taking enough stores and supplies for a return journey. But how far could one get on a one-way mission? In Central Asia there was the advantage of knowing that everything was illegal. There need be no doubt about co-operation and visas. Hostility from the officials would always be one hundred per cent. This, we reckoned, would mean a great saving of time in abolishing courtesy calls. Even in the comparatively peaceful inter-war years the Citroen expedition had had a terrible time, spending months in gaol, etc.

The *tsamma* melons appeared, and were frequent for half a mile or so, then petered out completely, to re-emerge after fifty and a hundred miles, although the country seemed much the same. One problem was the occurrence of awkward ground with the tall grass, especially in the neighbourhood of the pans or depressions.

Water is of pressing importance in Thirstland, and there were many inspections of our containers. I suppose each of us had a plan of behaviour ready in the event of accident, as we knew from experience that there is rapid mental deterioration with desert thirst. Sometimes the sufferer sits down to die in the sand, patient like an Arab. Usually the victim is found to have torn his chest with his nails in an effort to get relief.

At night our talk was not as cheerful as usual. I think we were all worried about locating the water dump. In books, Bob pointed out, the desert was said to give sublime thoughts to its dwellers, but he could not believe the scruffy gully-gullies, as he called them, of the Libyan desert had anything sublime about them. They were just about the lowest things that walked on two legs. "This romantic stuff is all wrong," said Bob. "Somebody should write a book about real people. About how all these wogs and such rob all the Christians, and how the kids are covered with flies and the mothers haven't got the sense to brush them away. And the stinks. Europe smells worse the further east you go, and once you get into the Near East and the Middle East and the Far East it just mounts up like a parlay."

"Why not draw a new atlas of smells?" said Peggy. "Call it a Smatlas."

The Kalahari was clearly a very different place from the grassless desert of popular fancy. There was tall grass everywhere in the frontier region, radiator-high. The air was full of grass seed, and without wire screens we would have been in real trouble.

From a distance the red plain looked flat enough, but this was deceiving. Driving was easy for good spells, but then there would be a series of erosion cracks, sudden drops of a few feet, hidden by the grass. In the distance was a black cloud, that we imagined to be a welcome sign of rain. It was a dust storm, one of a number that came up suddenly and swept over and past us. The dry air made us irritable, and sucked the salt from our bodies, so that we acquired a tremendous thirst.

We discussed the expedition of November-December 1952, led by Colonel Van der Post, that had included British and American experts, and Tshekedi Khama. I was confident this would achieve results, because the supply problem was in such capable hands. Previous efforts had broken down on this score. Supply is everything on a job like this. The English, to my mind, have not been at their best with such matters, as a rule. The attitude has been to cheese-pare, and to start things with grossly inadequate resources, and many regular officers of the old school betrayed a lamentable ignorance of logistics, although this is the very subject they are supposed to know.

The American civilian contractors supplying the Arabian oil fields had made the soldiers look very sick in this respect.

I was resolved that we should live well. I had had enough of living like a pig during World War II, although the amount of money spent on me would suggest that I was living on caviare and champagne. Where all the money went no one ever discovered. The men who did the fighting did not get it. They never do.

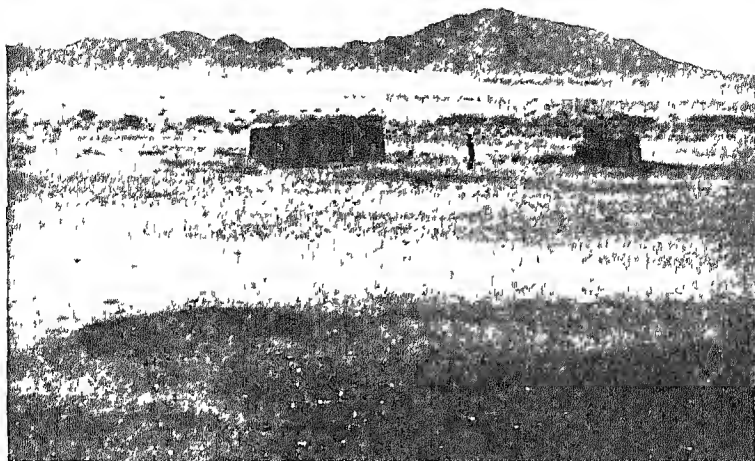
I explained to my companions that the better they lived the worse their position from a news-interest standpoint. If we lived on a handful of beans for a month, ran out of water, and contrived to get lost, we should probably work our way from the news-in-brief column to the front page in a few days. Bob could stagger, with blackened tongue, into Maun or Francistown, croaking, "We drew lots. I won. We ate our boots the twentieth day out. I lasted longest because I had the biggest feet." Peggy pointed out that if we got lost no one would be aware of it. Before getting lost it was essential that we should be expected somewhere. Who was expecting us? We admitted this was a serious flaw in any plan for losing a caravan. I had a personal conviction that people got lost because a map was so much Chinese to them, but it was undeniable that the sympathies of the public lay with people who got into trouble rather than with those slippery individuals who avoided it.

No one knew where we were but ourselves. It followed automatically that we could not get lost. We could disappear, but that was something quite different. This reasoning, if such it be, was received with acclamation, although Bob said, "We'll never become famous if we don't get lost, or practise a little quiet cannibalism or something. The American magazines wouldn't look at an expedition where everything went right."

"That's easily fixed," said Luke. "If a lion comes round we'll get Bob to deal with it, but don't shoot it. Wrestle with it for a bit, and we'll guarantee to give you a big write-up. We'll call the place where you died Bob's Your Uncle. That's what this place needs, a few show-places for visitors."

Luke declared that if we found Anderson's Vlei or Farini's lost city we might do ourselves a bit of good, but he did not believe in the existence of either.

Anderson, a great hunter of two generations earlier, had reported a lake in the Kalahari, but no one had seen it since. The 1928 Clifford expedition had searched the area mentioned by Anderson, without result. Anderson had also reported the existence of stone buildings in Thirstland, obviously not the work of the Bushmen. This fitted in with the story told by Farini, the American explorer, in 1885, about extensive stone walls, nearly a mile long, half-buried



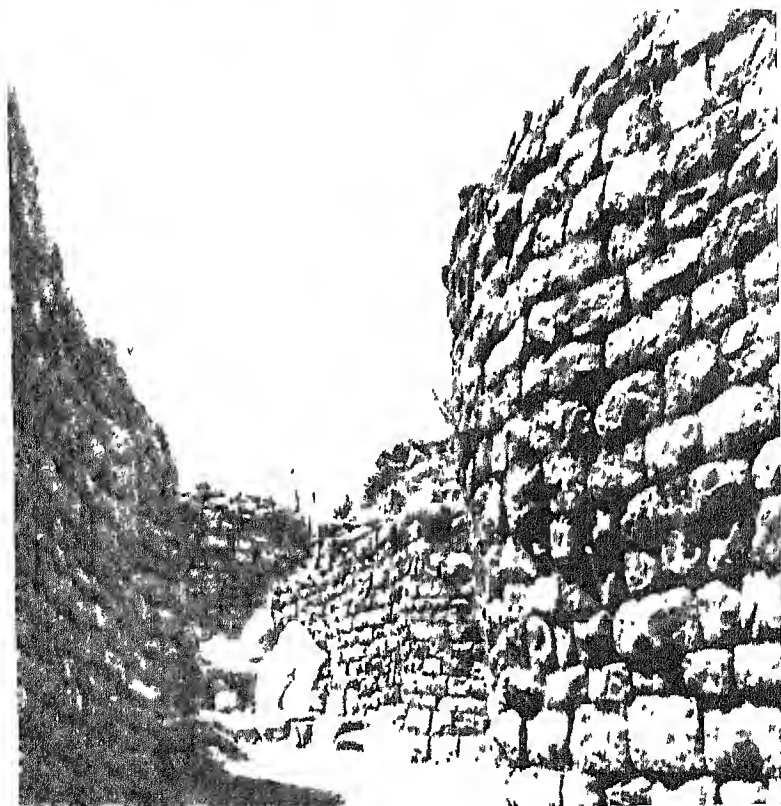
Edge of the sandy waste



Buffalo herd



Zambesi River bridge, boundary between N and S Rhodesia



Kham ruins, Southern Rhodesia

in the sand. The only confirmation of these stories was a rumour current south of the gemsbok reserve in the lower Kalahari about stone blocks in the hinterland, and the story of Erlanger, the German hunter, who had fallen into a pit containing water.

We discussed these and other stories, but had little confidence in them. Farini was not a surveyor, and the places marked on his maps had provided no important clues. Anderson and Erlanger may have come across one of the pools left in a rare wet season when the northern swamp and river areas had filled the old stream-courses. Such things happened about once in twenty years. Still, it was not impossible that some kind of buildings might have been erected in the distant past, when the climate was different. In the gemsbok area today there was no hope of an organized community, through lack of water. The gemsbok survived in ways known only to themselves. Some people thought they never drank. Certainly the Kalahari fauna has adapted itself to the extreme conditions. The Bushmen can go for days without water, and then drink several gallons at a time. The lions do not drink every night, and I suspect this is true of other animals. Every animal in Thirstland seems capable of travelling great distances before drinking, without undue privation.

Our encounter with Bushmen was staggering to us. We had intended to be friendly, supplying a drink, which is the great blessing in the dry heat. We did not believe that human beings could drink more than a pint or two at a time. A yard of beer had always been considered a heroic feat in the temperate lands. But the Bushmen and Bushwomen, little yellow and yellow-grey figures with protruding buttocks, could drink and drink and drink—a goatskin bag at a time. Gallons and gallons. I had visions of our careful planning falling to pieces. It was essential to my peace of mind that we see as few of the locals as possible. They did not even thank us. There was also our natural unwillingness to drink from containers they had touched. The Bushmen bellies can be seen to swell as they drink and eat. Their capacity for eating was on a par with the drinking feats. I thought the Kaffirs were remarkable in the amount of buck meat they could shift, gorging half the night, but they were completely outclassed by the aborigines.

The Bushmen could eat a whole buck between two men, at one sitting, gurking, belching, and choking to get the stuff down. This would mean about fifty men's rations at the time in England. If I brought a handful of Bushmen home with me, it was clear that I should be guilty of something very near to treason.

The aborigines smelled badly. Their eyes had a china-hard quality, unlike their liquid appearance in most humans. Their hair

grew in patches like mushrooms, or like the thin scrub of Thirstland, and it grew on the temples and sometimes on parts of the forehead. They were extremely nervous, like homeless cats brought into a kitchen for a saucer of milk. Suspicious, and keeping the strangers in view all the time they ate and drank. They were naked except for hide aprons, and it was not always easy to distinguish the sexes at a distance. The hair-length was the same, and the protruding buttocks and big swollen bellies destroyed the usual contours.

There was no such thing as "Women and Children First" in the Kalahari. The Bushmen came first, the women second, and the children third. It was like the story about the English actor who always travelled on French ships. When asked why, he replied, "There is no nonsense about women and children first if anything goes wrong." This was a fable, of course. He travelled for the food and the absence of organized games.

The first aborigines we saw seemed to rise up out of the sand. Despite the flatness of the landscape, they had utilised every bit of cover and dead ground, with such skill that we knew nothing about them until they appeared. They are wonderful runners. When I chased one with a clanging of the bell he set off at a good bat into the distance, and kept it up until out of sight. They shoot the game of the thirsty land with their poisoned arrows, and plod after it, steadily, until the wounded animal collapses. How a family traces the meatwinner it is hard to say, as there is no spoor discernible to the European eye. But the women and old people search around for tracks, blood spots, and suchlike, and set off, unerringly, in the right direction, perhaps on a three or four hours trek.

Most of the Bushmen of today have negro blood. The number of yellows must be small, but quite a few women have a definitely Chinese appearance. At all ages the eyes are puckered up against the glare. The wrinkles make everyone look older than their years. These people live a life of extreme hardship, from our point of view. They have no agriculture, and live by hunting, assisted by the wild berries and melons. Although they have wonderful lung-power (a man can smoke a cigarette in two or three puffs) they are deficient in certain respects. They could not jump more than a foot or two. A three feet jump would be beyond them. Nearly all Europeans can jump three and a half feet, at least. With the Bushmen this must be due to lack of practice, absence of trees and mountains, etc.

Yet a fifty miles walk would be nothing to them. The appetites are prodigious, but it must be remembered that some white Africans are famous for this capacity. In the Springbok Rugby team there were men who averaged fourteen eggs and three steaks a day throughout the tour.

The Bushmen slept in shelters of branches or scraps of brush laid on any depression, wherever they happened to be. As the herds of game move on, so do the hunters, so that in a year hundreds of miles will be covered.

I tried to find out how they took their bearings, and maintained a sense of direction in such a landscape—flat red earth and a few scattered thornbushes, with no trails. The evidence pointed to observation and sharp wits rather than to any subconscious instinct. Away from their home run, or something like it, the Bushmen were very timid and worried. In a town they would have been in a sorry state, terrified and holding hands, the way the Kaffir labourers are when they first see the streets of Jo'burg.

The Bushman language varies from district to district, but it all sounded like animal noises. This must be one of the most primitive of all tongues. Some of the tones were impossible to reproduce, although this may have been due to novelty. When learning Arabic for the first time it seems impossible to reproduce the gutturals, and honking notes from the back of the throat, but many white men manage to do it.

The Bushmen have no possessions, apart from their bows and arrows and sharp tins, etc., used for hunting and cutting. The women use ostrich shells, sealed with clay, for the water supply, burying the shells in the sand at selected points. Each family seems to have its own water area, and *tsamma* collection grounds. The red *meerkats* eat a lot of *tsammas*, and this can drive a family a long way out. There is plenty of room to move.

The Herero, who understand something of what the Bushmen said, explained that there was no intermarriage within a family. When a man wanted a wife he set off into the distance until he came up with some group willing to give him a wife. A young hunter would have no difficulty in finding a wife, despite his lack of gifts. The women have necklaces of ostrich shell beads, and this seems to be their only concession to art. One of the women, whom I had imagined to be over seventy, turned out to be only thirty or forty—these people never know their age within five or more years.

A piece of research into their digestive apparatus would be interesting. They can eat meat that is not only bad, but maggoty. Indigestion seems to be unknown. It has been known for many years that these aborigines have the faculty of storing food and water in their bodies, like camels. There must be great reserves of potential adaptation in the human family.

I refused to accept the idea that the Bushmen were no better than animals. They seemed to have definite intelligence, and their strange fears would be due to ignorance. Later on I saw Bushmen

who have been trained as houseboys, and they seemed above the average Bantu in brains. The women were unsightly to us, with our ideas of slimness, long hair, and cleanliness. They must lead a dreadful life, carrying the burdens and for ever tramping the sandy waste. The children had something wild and animal-like in their behaviour, with a strange look of age in their opaque eyes. The little boys could run very fast without getting winded, and seemed to enjoy this exercise. Maybe all the slow movers have been killed through the centuries. Everyone snatched at food and went off to eat it alone, like a lion in a zoo, his back to a sandbank and his eyes on the visitors. Could these be the people we were all descended from? Was this pre-Stone Age Man? If so, our ancestors were a rough crowd, and we should think ourselves lucky they migrated to colder spots.

It was very hot. The thermometer never went below a hundred, and I could not take anyone's temperature, even if they felt poorly, as the mercury was always over blood heat. The heat was dry, and there were no mosquitoes. These stick to the swamp lands of the north, and the few spots of standing water.

It is always assumed that the Kalahari is impossible for horses, but the small Kalahari ponies I saw round the Gordonia district, not far from the gemsbok preserve, could be used with much effect. They are never seen in the centre and north, but I cannot see why they should not be useful to cattle-ranchers on the desert edge. They would be a big factor in cutting into the wasteland outskirts.

These ponies are all skin and bone, about fourteen hands, and can do about five miles an hour in the desert. A big horse would be lost. The ponies do not suffer from thirst in the way that a draught horse would, and they can get nourishment out of the desert vegetation. They would have to be Kalahari-bred, and farriers and forges would be needed to keep them properly shod, as the hot sand would destroy their hooves. Men on these ponies, with big leather water-bottles, sun-goggles, and fly-nets, could ride the boundaries of the new ranches in the early stages, at least. The best age would be about five to eight years old. Camels are used today, by the police, but these creatures are an awkward ride for anyone who lacks the horny hindquarters of the Arab.

Anyone who thinks it impossible to use horses in sand like this should study Botha's campaign north of Swakop in 1915, and the Kemp ride across Thirstland. The Boer commandos were able to move at a rate of over two hundred miles a week. These men must have been among the world's finest soldiers. The new principle of the speed of the fastest man being the speed of the group has never been fully appreciated. Botha, who never read a military text-book

in his life, was the man who thought it up, and carried it into practice. These Afrikaner farmers are wonderful men, even today, with great physical strength, and great initiative. They still live in the Victorian age, and are therefore always convinced of the rightness of their views. This is a great advantage when it comes to doing things.

We saw a few mirages in the Kalahari, usually round early evening. We saw one before, north of Swakop, showing the sea in the sky. The desert land mirages usually showed distant farms or river beds. They made no impression upon us, or the Bushmen. Some of the Bushmen were over a hundred years old, I was told, although I do not know how they could know, as natives are very hazy about dates and figures. Many of them looked about a hundred and fifty, but looks are not everything, as the sailor said. The Bushmen told our natives that great age was due to eating the flesh of wild animals. To eat the flesh of a tame creature like a horse or sheep, they claimed, would be to lose half the strength of the meat. Africa is certainly a great advertisement for meat-eaters. The strongest Afrikaner farmers were men who ate several pounds of fresh meat a day. We ate large quantities ourselves, and thrived on it, but we did not concentrate on a meat diet alone. We were all descendants of big meat-eaters. My father had always been a big eater of raw meat, and my grandfather polished off a bird at a sitting. He would have been disgusted at the vegetarian habits of today, and would probably have returned to the gauchos of the Argentine pampas, among whom he spent part of his youth.

We had a clash with a puff-adder—a snake about three feet long. This thing was near a shallow *donga* where we had outspanned, and might have come on us unawares as we gathered sticks. A ratel came on it and settled it before it could do any damage. I swore at the time I would never kill a ratel. These creatures are honey-badgers, silver on top, black beneath, about as big as a bear-cub, and not unlike one. They love sweet things, and we gave this one a good time. The ratel must be one of the bravest of all animals; he does not seem to be afraid of anything. His loose skin probably protects him against the mambas and cobras. He is very sensitive, and utters shrill cries if anything upsets his nerves. I liked the ratels. Peggy and I liked all the small furry creatures of the wilds, and in other countries we have established good relations with creatures as far apart as cheetahs and the spectacled bear.

I regretted I had not taken time off to learn about blood-group samples, as I could see how useful this information would be to the anthropologists. The technique is simple enough, I believe, but whether or not the Bushmen would allow samples to be taken is

another story. This work will eventually trace the story of man's beginnings and the geography of his wanderings.

Enough is known already to show that the orthodox teachings of the world's universities is a mile off the mark. No doubt in a few years time a scientist will collate the findings and the statistics and evolve a worthy successor to the *Origin of Species* and the histories of Wells and Van Loon. The new findings, some of them buried today in the archives of UNESCO, will cause a great sensation in the scientific world.

Luke thought that much of the country we were traversing, of the northern Kalahari, would be good for ranching, and even for sorghum, beans, and pumpkins. Bob visualized a bore-hole with a rain-making project around, on the lines of those already functioning on the Palestine fruit-farms. It is obvious from the lie of the land that the Kalahari was once a well-watered region. For some reason the sand does not fill the dry river-beds.

The possibilities are enormous. In 1952 the Colonial Development Corporation controlled by Lord Reith, that ace of administrators, had graded seven million acres of crown land in the north-east corner of Bechuanaland, and this is to be devoted to ranching and agriculture. Six hundred thousand acres in the south was earmarked as a holding ground for slaughter. With roads and transport here, carcasses could be shipped in huge numbers to the Union and the Rhodesias. This seems to be a good beginning, but only a beginning. It is impossible to rush things in Africa, but there is no doubt that the whole of Thirstland can be brought into use in a few decades. The man who buys or leases land there today is certain to make money if he can hang on long enough.

There is, I was told, an officer of the Bechuanaland Police named Brown. I was glad to avoid him, as whenever there are several Browns about, there is danger of confusion with messages, orders, and suchlike. Sometimes this has its comic side, as when I was once arbitrarily transferred to the army reserve, without the slightest warning, when serving at a headquarters in some obscure and ill-defined capacity. On another occasion a man who admitted his name was John Brown was given a good hiding for his honesty before he could explain his innocence.

Lord Northcliffe said that a man should have a distinctive name if he wished to write for the newspapers. He knew his public. No columnist called William Smith could be expected to survive. The American habit of using definitive Christian names is useful. Dwight D. Smith or Franklin D. Jones might have a chance of keeping a job. Brown is a hopeless name. One could use a number in the army style of Brown 226, but this would lay one open

to the charge of eccentricity, and this is a drawback when applying for grants-in-aid from learned societies. Respectability and orthodoxy—dark suit, white linen, black shoes, quiet socks, a bowler and a tightly rolled umbrella, with a carefully-folded copy of *The Times* and a fair sprinkling of "May I suggest, sirs," with a rigid avoidance of any definite statement, and a stress on the conditional, is the right line.

One man I know objects to respectability so much that he carries with him clockwork mice and rubber biscuits, with which to oppress the stuffed shirts, whom he regards as a great affliction. Once I was seated at a table opposite this man, discussing some very weighty subject such as a condominium or the increasing weight of the polar ice cap when the heavy pronouncements of my neighbour on the right were interrupted by a loud quacking as a very lifelike goose marched across the table. My friend of the clockwork mice, dispirited at being left out of the conversation, had been winding up his latest buy. It is impossible to talk about addendums, referendums, minimums, maximums, and the other -ums when a clockwork creature appears over the edge of the table. The human eye, like that of the cat, is irresistibly drawn towards any novel object that moves and utters. Such diversions at international conferences.

In the Kalahari the Bushmen had a great deal to say about us, but as I could not understand a word it made no odds. Peggy had an adventure with some lanolin cream. She was rubbing some of this on her face when a native woman asked for some of the lanolin with unmistakable signs. When Peggy saw the woman an hour later she was just finishing off the last of the jar's contents, scraping her long fingers round the bottom and licking the cream with evident enjoyment.

We drove on and on through the red waste. It should have been exciting, but it was boring. I felt very depressed, as Bob had pointed out our lack of an infra-red lamp and colour chart for nocturnal survey. Apparently the infra-red lamp shows up hidden minerals like tropical fish. This method may be familiar to the new-style prospectors in Arizona and New Mexico, but I had never heard of it before. It was just the kind of thing I prided myself on having, too. I began making excuses for myself. I could not read all the books and pamphlets in half a dozen countries, and keep in contact with all the big firms. I did not even know all the names of the big firms. It would take years of preparation and by then the lab boys would have sprung some more surprises. After all, I was only an amateur, and so on. Excuses come easily to the man seeking to alibi himself, but it was no use. I could not convince myself, so I did not try to convince anyone else. I admitted that I had tripped

up, and fallen flat on my face. I would have to stay there too, as I was not duplicating this journey, not even if I found Aladdin's lamp.

When things go wrong, it is said, they go wrong in threes. We were attacked by swarms of insect horrors. What the insects lived on when we were not there it was hard to say, but I could imagine their patrols beating tiny dinner gongs when we turned up.

Then we could not find Jacobus and the water dump. A tiny error in observations can throw a ship well off course, and in the sand we were in the same boat. Bob thought he had taken excellent bearings of the dump position. Trouble was the similarity of much of the landscape.

We cruised in a wide circle, without result. What was to be done next? If we stayed we should run short ourselves and have no option but to head back west, with our tails between our legs, and there would have to be a search party. Our explanations would not sound too good if things went wrong, and there could be little doubt that we would be refused permission for a further advance. The panjandrams would have a glorious opportunity of saying, "We told you what to do, and you wouldn't listen. You people don't know the country. Ill-conceived, ill-prepared, and poorly-executed, etc."

We talked over what could have been done. Rockets could have been sent up, to be answered by other rockets. A trail could have been blazed. Gongs, bells, and drums could have been used as signals, or smoke from fires. We kept saying "He must be somewhere about." But where?

CHAPTER XIII

THROUGH THE DESERT

Fed and watered ; the Makarikari Salt Pan ; bore-holes and sand-storm ; witch doctors and white man's medicine ; some road and railway projects.

I decided to head south and west, and then swing east again in a wide arc. As there were no obvious signs of recent rain, it seemed possible that some tracks might be visible, so long as we moved only in full light, and stuck to the open stretches. A run of fifteen miles in all brought us to traces, and we examined the spoor with excited cries, changing to joyful shouts as we recognized the treads. The rest was plain sailing, for the tracks led us to the dump and Jacobus, who had got his head down on a blanket, like a sensible man, unaware of any panic. He seemed a little surprised at the warmth of our affection, but we did not enlighten him, showering little gifts to cover our feelings.

Of course, when we had wanted to see a Bushman, there had been none. Now that we no longer needed one, there was a man on the skyline. We ran towards him screaming, but he was off like a greyhound. It may have been terror, but it was more probably the prospect of work looming up that jolted him. I never got as far as being able to discuss this with tribesmen, or aborigines, but the feeling that work was beneath a man's dignity seemed common enough. I know a man in London who thinks in the same way. Once when he was told a hard-luck story by a stranger who said, "I haven't worked for six months," my friend patted the other man on the shoulder and said, "Cheer up. I haven't worked for twenty years." Some mighty social convulsion will be required to get him started. War and communism, separately or together, would be inadequate.

We loaded up and had our first good meal for days. Despite the heat, no one seemed to be losing weight. If we lost a few pounds in the forenoon, we put it on again with the first drink and lick of salt. This is an ancient problem, with its peculiar side. I have never been able to understand how a man can sweat off three pounds of weight and replace this in a couple of hours with a single pint of water, weighing one and a quarter pounds. Where does the difference come from?

Now that everything was under control again, we should have felt

like pressing on at maximum speed, to make up for lost time. We should have been refreshed and vigilant. As it was, we lay down on blankets and read books and magazines.

"I always think the papers are dull when there's nothing about me in them," said Bob. "Yes, you can look," he bawled at Luke. "Think I haven't seen you scraping through the *Johannesburg Times* and the *Diamond Diggers Clarion*."

"*Diamond Fields Advertiser*," corrected Luke, "and for your information it's the sports columns I read."

"OK, sport."

Our objective was the outer edge of the Makarikari Salt Pan, which covers about seven hundred square miles. This place is mostly sand, but it seemed likely that there was ample water not far below the surface. There are some government wells already in this area, and it is likely that there will be many more by 1960. There were minerals in the Tati district, which was once part of Matabeleland, but that did not concern us. Water was primary.

Rainfall figures for the Kalahari, such as they are, may be very misleading, as we found it was possible for rain to fall on one side of a dune, but not on the other. The siting of rain gauges is always a chancy business, but in such country as this statistics mean less than usual. There must be some agent in the soil which accounts for the lightning growth of vegetation after a shower. It would also be interesting to know how the desert plants retain their vitality through years of drought. Two or three years without rain do not seem to affect the plants, while the *tsammas* are a mystery, like the force that shoots them up out of the sandy soil that conceals their growth.

It was now necessary to empty our boots before putting them on, as some of the local snakes seemed fond of such hides. There were no monitors, although there are plenty of these reptiles further north. At a distance they resemble a small alligator. The ratels were busy, turning somersaults when pleased, or after nosing out a lode of honey. We tried to drill holes in a serval, but he was off like a shot. This wild cat, with long legs, is one of the most fierce animals in the world. Snarling and spitting, there is nothing like him except a mad puma. Yet in appearance they are not unlike the domestic pussy of Europe. Some were black, others spotted like genets. It is just as well they do not grow any bigger than six or seven pounds. A huge serval would be something to remember.

As the Kalahari is well above sea level, the nights were colder than we had expected. Still, the cold was nothing to the dank chill of the Namib Desert, which is unforgettable.

We cut ourselves on thorn bush and grapple plant, and the wounds

might have turned septic but for our regular disinfections. We began to see the reason for our many inoculations.

All the desert animals, like the aborigines, seemed a bit on the crazy side. The ostriches flew off at the slightest sound, even when far beyond rifle range. The springbok were driven mad by the grapple plant poison, and our favourite the ratel is an anxiety neurosis type if ever there was one, even when things are going well.

Moving to the north there is more vegetation, but for a time there seemed to be no evidence of water. Maybe the underground supplies here are very deep.

We arrived at a pan, and the others saw me studying a map. "Where are we now?" asked Luke.

"According to this map we are in the middle of Lake Ngami," I told him. The lake had dried up. The Okavongo river ran into the lake at one time, but that must have been some years ago. The tall trees—mostly camelthorn—gave evidence of the extent of the lake in the olden days. We saw no Bushmen up here, maybe because of the presence of wild animals that could not be eaten.

How the Bushmen detect the presence of sub-surface water it is hard to say. They give away no secrets in this field. I imagine that the grapple plant is the indicator, but it may be something else. At all events, they are mobile, and can cast around and find water in a day, almost anywhere, although no white man has been able to cross the desert without reserves. We were in a strong position, as not only had we made careful calculations of the necessary supplies, but we had chemicals for clearing the brackish stuff from any pools, instruments for detecting underground water, and a knowledge of condensing, and even of extracting moisture from the cactus. As a final resource, I knew that trees with a large hole near the base, and rotting or dead branches, often contain moisture, and there were many such trees to the north. Our anatomy was very poor, but there was always a chance of shooting game and extracting water from the stomach, if the worst came to the worst. The accepted tricks about sucking pebbles in the mouth to alleviate thirst were no good, in great heat, with so much salt being lost from the system.

In theory it would be possible to do something about the waters of the Okavongo river in the north-west. In practice I doubt if anything will be done. There is no great enthusiasm in the neighbouring territories for a scheme that would not bring any immediate benefits, and would also cost a disproportionate amount, due to the lack of skilled labour and the absence of transport facilities.

Opinions are divided about the southern Kalahari, as although this is sweet veld country, with nourishing grasses, the experts claim it is natural fodder bank against drought. In very bad years, like

1948, the Crown land has been thrown open to farmers from the south, and thousands of head of livestock saved, allowing for the hundreds of sheep killed by the jackals. The Soil Conservation Department takes the view that the high grass between the dunes is a barrier against sand drift, and if the usual backveld farming methods were employed the whole place would revert to true desert in a few years, and this desert would march south, like the Sahara, at a rate of maybe five miles a year. Our view was that the Orange River waters should be utilized, and many boreholes sunk, in a fairly big experimental settlement scheme, using new-style farmers accustomed to taking advice. There are many such men in northern Cape Province—the kind of men who ward off storms with rockets, and know as much about weather as R.A.F. “Met” officers.

The Kalahari is a big place, nearly half a million square miles, and the average population, including the big tribal reserves in the south-east, is less than one per square mile. Some maps make the Kalahari bigger than the Union, and covering a third of southern Africa below the Zambesi. Something will have to be done with such an opportunity.

The Kalahari can no longer be considered as a mere field for exploration. Jim Brand has made a crossing, and has proved the possibility of several routes. Cyril Challis, of Ealing, who has spent 19 years in the country, and John Marniwick, born out there, a friend of Challis, have been across, with Harry Watt. Then there is Colonel Van der Post, born out there, and his party, and E. J. Wayland and Professor Debenham and his crowd, plus a few extra C.D.C. boys from Britain, the Union, and the States. All the research work fits together to make an optimistic picture.

I estimate a probability figure of two out of every three bore-holes proving a success in the areas covered so far. Every time water in quantities is struck it can mean another twelve thousand acres of grass land available for cultivation or grazing. Boreholes cost plenty, but as land values jump four hundred per cent on a strike, the hole pays for itself twice out of three times, and the administrations concerned will usually make useful financial grants, win or lose.

Rhodes had the foresight, years ago, to recognize the possibilities. He gave free farms to sixty families, around Ghanzi. Ghanzi is east of Windhoek, and is now a thriving centre for the ranchers. More than 100,000 head of cattle are grazed round here today, and the owners are rich men. The original leader is still alive—Hendrik Taljaard. Thomas Hardcastle, of Ghanzi, was once a police constable in London. Policemen make fine settlers. Their job calls for resource and determination and steady routine, a powerful combination. Burton, his friend, is a New Zealander, and another

veteran of the Boer War is Mr. Ramsden, from Australia. Bush McIntyre, another Kiwi from Ghanzi, was once lost in the desert, and his life was saved by an aborigine—a woman, who sucked water through the sand from one of the secret sip-wells, and siphoned it off to McIntyre, in the same way that they employ with their children.

Ghanzi is supposed to be very malarial, but the fact that five whites have spent fifty years apiece there is a good testimonial. It was at Gobabis that the Bushmen attacked a native farm late in 1952. A few people were shot at with the poisoned arrows but the business was cleared up with a few arrests. The substance on the poisoned arrow-tips has not yet been isolated, but the locals take great pains not to scratch themselves with it if they get an arrow. It may be adenium plant juice. Lions do not often come down as far as this, but a few have been shot, usually six-footers (steel tape tip of nose to root of tail) and around a fifth of a ton in weight, or four times heavier than a leopard. Most of the game has been driven into Ngamiland. There is a radio link from Ghanzi with outlying police posts, maintained by the Public Works Department. In time this network will mark flourishing town centres, all the way from Mafeking to south-west, and north to the Caprivi and beyond.

At one time there was a lot of talk about a railway from the Wankie coalfield area in Rhodesia to Walvis Bay, crossing the Kalahari, but I found no enthusiasm for the project today. That is not to say it could not happen. Walvis is the best harbour on the west coast, almost land-locked, and an opening-up of the Kalahari would mean a tremendous spurt in trade, while southern Angola would have a chance to get rid of her natural wealth, with a good ferry service or bridge across the Kunene or a rail link further east.

The tribesmen of the surrounding zones could be induced to work if the area started to buzz. Ten shillings a week would be considered a top-class wage. Rations of two pounds of mealie-meal a day, half a pound of meat or less, and enough sugar, beans, salt, and fruit, would be ample. A great deal is being done for native health, but there will be a fair period before conditions are comparable with those of the Rand. Inertia would be the chief obstacle to progress, as most of the energetic types will have left the district to better themselves, just as happened in the so-called depressed areas of Britain during the nineteen thirties. This is the flaw in every scheme of social betterment. The only way to attract a horde of healthy young men to a place seems to be a strike of gold, diamonds, or uranium, although in wartime they will go anywhere for a dollar a day and no questions asked.

Occasionally we came across piles of yellow melons stacked up by the Bushmen, of whom there was no trace, and hardly a sign of

spoor. We used the melons freely, to help out our water problem. What the Bushmen, no doubt observing us in the distance, thought about it, we could not say, but we left them a few odds and ends of compensation. A rusty tin would be a great help to them, for they are very short of sharp edges and containers, and appear to have no talent for improvisation.

Peggy kept looking out for rain, recalling her success in bringing easement to the parched earth at Omaruru, where an inch of rain had fallen in four days. One of the Boer farmers had told her about the Rain Queen, a supposedly white woman chieftainess of a tribe in the Northern Transvaal. The locals had kidded the whites for years about this lady, reputedly the descendant of white adventurers from way back. There was no doubt that a black woman did exist, and for all I know exists today, who was supposed to have special rain-making gifts, but the native story about the black woman being a stooge for a white queen who never emerges from a mountain hideout sounds like good old *isanusi* propaganda. Africa is full of such tales, and they all have a foundation in fact. On the Wild Coast of the Union, as Pondoland is called, there are people who are descendants of white folk shipwrecked there generations ago. One of these people was Lobengula's chief adviser in Matabeleland. But most descendants of whites who have to live native-style or among natives deteriorate in a few generations, like the Rehoboth Bastaards. Climate and ignorance are great weights, pressing downwards.

There was good quality jute and a lot of hardwood trees in the swamp area of the north. Luke pointed out that the apparent suitability of the area for cattle ranching—Afrikaners with a few Red Polls—was misleading. There was serious danger of overgrazing. With a bore-hole every 2,000 acres things would be different. Too much tramping, Luke said, would weaken the beef cattle, and make a great difference to market possibilities. He thought in terms of a government water scheme as primary. It would be easy to sink wells in the porous limestone, which is ragged, and is near the surface in practically all parts of the wasteland. The sand was from five to some hundreds of feet in depth, and there were very few elevations. In the pans there was soft white clay, with water beneath, only a few feet from the surface.

Peggy was disturbed by the multitude of spiders that found a way into the lorry cabs. There were also many large caterpillars. The wear and tear on the skin was considerable, with all the small debris we picked up. We had to rub ointment on ourselves twice a day, and even the Kaffirs, with their thick skins, were in trouble.

The further east we went the more frequent were the indications of underground water. We could not touch the south-east, as this

was the Bamangwato country, usually called Khama's country. Some reporters were out there in the late nineteen forties, following the rhubarb about the chief marrying a white woman, and a few of their lost cars were still in the desert. We could not tackle the eastern portion of the Caprivi because of its remoteness.

The eastern Caprivi, now under the Department of Native Affairs of the Union was at one time under Windhoek, but it was impossible to control the area east of Long. 21° East. The Kwando and Okavongo are not always negotiable, and then there is the long desert run, while the Windhoek route is through Bechuanaland or through the Union and the Rhodesias. There is a court, and, I believe, a gaol somewhere up there, at Katimo Mulilo. This must be the only frontier in the world that has to be reached by way of two other countries.

Our natives covered themselves with tarpaulins and bucksail to avoid the skin-scraping dust. It was easy to see how so much eye trouble was prevalent in the territory. Sun glasses were essential.

We went through a period of tiredness, not bothering to look at books, and turning in after the sunset meal. It was probably a loss of energy due to change of temperature and altitude. There was a burst of briskness in the mornings after breakfast, but this soon died away. We talked now of the fleshpots of the outside world, and the delights of sit-down meals with napkins and wine. We compared the flavours of long, cool drinks in different countries. We planned wonderful meals we would have. It is always like this when austerity sets in. Luxury begins to attract even the most frugal individual. Luke was always talking about the simple life of the bushveld, but his idea of simplicity was three pounds of steak a day, with several kinds of vegetables on the side, and unlimited supplies of fruit and coffee and fresh eggs.

It was not surprising, Bob said, that we were better able to withstand thirst than himself. Luke, for example, came from a place where the citizens were practically awash, while the Browns had been trained from infancy to go long periods without water. I asked him to elucidate, and he described his wanderings in Britain, where no hotel, restaurant, or café, according to him, had ever served a glass of water, unbidden, to a guest.

"Sometimes they asked me if I didn't feel well," said Bob. "Just because I wanted a drink of water. When they did bring it, it was warm as often as not. They made as much fuss about bringing up a glass of water as it if were radio-active. And if I asked for another, after drinking the first glass, they started a gripe. You don't want to write in that book of yours about how the Bushmen can go without water. Just start with the English. I doubt if

anyone there tastes water more than once a year or so, when they are taken faint. Do you ever drink water at home?"

I thought hard. "Not if I can help it. Don't forget we soak it up all day through our skins, what with the fog, the mist, and the rain. There's no need to take it internally. Probably bring on rheumatism, or pneumonia, or floating kidneys, or something. . . ."

Luke said, "Anyone who drinks ice water all day, or is willing to live in fog, either, should have his head examined. The more intelligent people have already made their way to the sunny lands. As the years go by the people in England will get stupider and stupider, as the more intelligent ones go overseas, and the silly people breed themselves sillier. The same thing has been happening in America. I read an article about industry moving south, and California has got millions more population. I read another article about the children in England. They can't read when they leave school."

"What magazines have you got here?" asked Bob. "You must have been reading the funnies."

"I read English and American magazines," Luke retorted, "I read about hundreds of British and American soldiers who can't read or write. They'll have to issue the orders in pictures and hieroglyphics like the Pharaohs. Even you three read comics, out here. You have a good laugh at them, and then pass them on to the Kaffirs. It's like a common language."

"What I like about you is the quiet modesty of your theories," said Bob. "The dignified scientific approach, and the way you keep up to date with all the dirt."

"Better be careful, boys," said Peggy. "All this stuff is being written down and will be given in evidence."

* * * *

After a few days of trundling and jolting across the Kalahari, we began to feel that we had been there all our lives. The Namib seemed to belong to another age. Only the constant arguments at sundown provided a savour. Our eyes were often sore with microscopic dust particles. These were not as bad as the mica particles of the west coast, but produced irritation. We took extra precautions, and the condition passed off. One of the boys had an aching tooth. I treated this with a preparation obtained in England, which gave relief. The alternative would have been to practise rough dental surgery, and this is no job for an amateur.

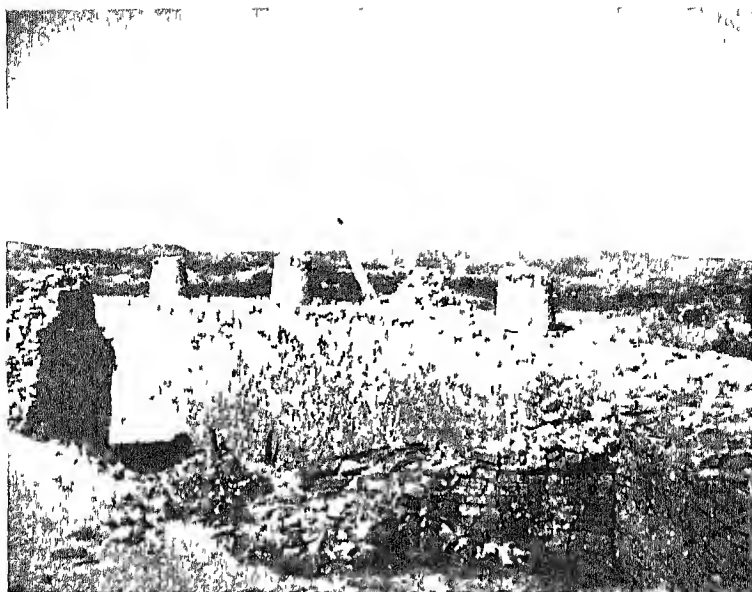
It would have been a good idea to have a doctor with us, but none applied to go. We might, perhaps, have recruited one of the African doctors trained at Fort Hare and elsewhere, but there was no time for contact. I did not write, I am not keen on correspondence with



Outer wall of the temple



In the Zimbabwe ruins



The Acropolis, Zimbabwe



Inner walls of the temple

the heads of institutions and suchlike unless there is a pressing reason. Scientists are very nattery. No matter how politely I frame a letter, the reply comes in such chilling and guarded terms that one is inevitably reminded of the Iron Curtain. A science degree should include a short examination in human relations. If some scientists treat their wives the way they treat their correspondents their home life must be in a shocking state.

After seeing no wild life for days, we came across wildebeest and duiker, but had no luck with the guns. A sandstorm came up and gave us a bad time. Eyes and ears and mouths were choked. Progress was impossible. We crouched together in such shelter as we could improvise, against the tearing wind. I was reminded of war time, but this was better fun. The difficulties one chooses can be seen ahead. The difficulties other people get us into are always unforeseen, and the other people get the credit if we surmount them. I might, I told myself, be going through all this bother for a dollar a day, up and down the Kalahari ten times over on dog biscuits, jam made out of carrots and rotten eggs made into a powder, with my respirator and Geiger counter in the alert position. We could really count our blessings, and go down on our bended knees like the Moslems every day at sunrise and sunset to give thanks for being out of government employ.

Ninety miles east of Ngamiland the hand generator developed a fault, and we could no longer continue observations. We had a conference on the nature of the fault.

Bob fixed the generator. American know-how, he pointed out, must triumph, even in the Dark Continent and surrounded by people with a mediaeval and possibly a neolithic outlook.

While doctoring the natives one morning I decided to enquire about their ideas of white medicine and witch doctors, to see if the old methods still held good. With the help of Jacobus, Martinus, and Luke I got quite a fair amount of detail. The witch doctors of today, I gathered, are compelled to be what is best described as herbalists, from the white point of view. They present this face to the white authorities, in case of awkward questions about local deaths. To the natives, however, they maintain the old front with a few modifications. It is also common for a native witch doctor to have a few white clients, from the poorer-paid sections. The natives assured me that the idea popular among the Europeans that natives do not suffer as much as whites is quite wrong. In Zululand it might stem from the native stress on not showing pain, Luke told me, adding that it was one thing not to show it and another not to feel it.

None of the natives were keen on pill medicine, which they regard

as a stop-gap and of no great curative value. The more exotic and acrid the medicine, the greater the psychological impact. In this, I cannot see any difference between the proletariats anywhere. In Burma in World War II one doctor, irritated by his lack of patients, set out to defeat the local witch-doctors at their own game, and rigged up an apparatus like a rola-bola from a fair-ground, with coloured electric lamps, vacuum bottles, and rotating arms. Patients were given the full treatment of flashers, grippers, and whirlabouts, and soon spread the word. The witch-doctors could not compete with a combined Coronation Procession and Big Dipper, and were soon reduced to working for a living.

In Africa the witch-doctors have one advantage that will ensure them a few loyal patients, come what may. This is the custom of ascribing illness or trouble to a spell or an ill-wishing by an enemy or another witch-doctor. This is better for one's self respect than an illness due to one's own excesses. There was not much faith in the free clinics and government centres, as the natives reckoned medicine that did not have to be paid for could not be much good. Put a clinic right on the edge of a reserve, and the locals will still wander twenty miles through mamba country to visit a mud-covered wizard, who charges them ten shillings a head for a consultation. This is the kind of thing that is difficult to nail down in blue books, as on paper the witch-doctor is too old and ignorant and lives too far away to be a menace, and the natives cannot afford ten shillings and the women cannot spare the time to leave their kraals.

In time the white man's medicine, being the stronger, will prevail. Great improvements have been made already, and if the first results are an enormously increased population, and less food per head, and the survival of the unfit, we cannot blame the doctors. They are doing their job. The results are for other people to study.

Our route took us across the proposed line for the Walvis Bay—Livingstone railway. Nothing has been done about this plan, although there have been any number of conferences. We could see no reason why the line should not be built, from a topographical point of view. The proposed line would run from the Olifant's Kloof district by way of Monyalatsela to Dauga, west of the Makarikari, then turn sharp north for Livingstone. A branch line could link up from a point north of Joani with Bulawayo. On the government map we had was a place marked, with a delightful absence of initiative, *Native Village*. No one has got round to giving it a name yet. I suggest the Protectorate start a new style of names for places—the commemoration of those unknown benefactors of the human race who invented refrigerators, home-perms, water-closets, bedside lamps, typewriters, zip-fasteners, etc.

The railway has been under discussion for fifty or sixty years. People who have been out to the Kalahari have returned to write books and articles, all applauding the idea of a rail link between Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, and South-west. Latterly there was a tendency for the Angola government to come in. The last conference about the plan was held a year or two back, in Portuguese territory. It seems evident that the local governments concerned will not start anything. Someone will have to come in from outside. The railway is a ready-made Fourth Point job, as on paper it is impossible to prove that anyone contributing money now is going to make anything out of it. The contrast between the dedication to public service in the speeches, and the hyena-like haggling over pennies in private is unedifying. The politicians are, in fact, afraid of a white elephant railway, which would lie unused and rusting, a memorial to their wrangling, and liable to be christened Somebody's Folly. A public man can stand anything save anonymity and ridicule. The locals should take heart from the financial disasters of recent years. No one save those personally concerned remembers the navigators, who invariably leap from the sinking ship just before the siren blows, and stay in plush-lined obscurity, licking their wounds, until the PRO's have found a face-saving formula. One of these days such a man will make a name for himself by coming forward and saying, "I was wrong. I made a big mistake. I am responsible. I should be horse-whipped." This has never happened since the days of Caligula, as one cannot count the Russian trials, where everyone confesses to everything, even to being in hotels after they were burnt down, with people who died years before. Yet when I was in Russia a famous man was collecting Soviet statistics to use as a base for a book! *Naïveté* can go no further.

There were many eland in the Kalahari, more even than in Angola. The eland is a nice docile antelope, and makes good eating. He seems to have taught himself to do without much water, like a retired British colonel on the Mediterranean coast. He certainly helped to solve our food problem.

The six years war had destroyed great areas of productive land, taken millions of men away from the soil, and sunk hundreds of shiploads. It was impossible to live in Britain after 1945 and not be conscious of the world's need for more production. Half of the world's cocoa was produced in East Africa, and the plantations were riddled with disease. There was an urgent need for pest-proof silos to prevent famine. There were millions of cows in Africa that were never touched by hand—never milked, wandering in wild herds. In the United Kingdom every cow is registered, and every gallon paid

for. The contrast was alarming. In 1947, when drought came to Rhodesia, thousands and thousands of cattle were killed because there was neither cold storage nor suitable transport available to deal with the crisis. It was not impossible that the English meat ration might be doubled from African production alone. After all, a Frenchman was eating three times as much meat as an Englishman already.

How long would it be before the African was taught to store grain and to grow root-crops? To create a public opinion which would not allow the animals to be reduced to skin and bone, and insist on local storage feed as against the scanty herbage of migration? There was no theoretical reason why African beef should not be as good as that of the pampas. The best cattle were in England, from where they could cross-breed with African and other cattle, to improve the world's herds. The Russians had derived immense benefit from importing English pedigree stock twenty years ago. Artificial insemination had pointed the way to an expanding future.

Africa is rarely seen by the kind of man who can think big and get things done—a rare type. I only wish I had this kind of talent myself. It seems to be confined to a few business men. Take the hens. Eggs are four a penny in Africa in the backveld. Think what could be done with decent poultry, compared with the frightful creatures pecking about the kraals!

There are enormous swamp areas in East Africa, where rice could easily be grown on enormous paddy fields. As it is, the locals import the stuff, because they do not have a clue as to how it should be grown.

Indian runner ducks can live without much water. A few thousand of these in East Africa and Central Africa and the Karroo would make a difference to the local economy. Possibly a revolutionary difference. An even bigger experiment might be with onions and potatoes. The Kaffir, weary of the eternal mealie meal, is always enthusiastic about imported vegetables. There must be some varieties of potato (apart from sweet potato) and onion, that will flourish in Africa. How many experiments have been made? If the potato can grow in the Andes and then be transplanted to Germany, Russia, and Britain with success, it can be grown in parts of Africa, where there is a bewildering variety of climate.

In the western world agricultural revolutions are common enough. Between 1939 and 1945 British agriculture became the most efficient in the world, with more horse-power per head of workman than in Russia, the States, or Canada. From being 40 per cent self-sufficient, Britain became 70 per cent independent of imports. This was a great achievement, recalling the heavy drainage of skilled men to the armed forces.

It was impossible for us to cross Africa without thinking of Rhodes's dream of a Cape to Cairo railroad. This is still a dream. Rhodes never guessed that in the nineteen fifties there would not even be a west-to-east railroad. There are air services of a kind, but it will be another generation before air transport gets out of its troubles. Meanwhile, there is not even a decent road across the continent. There are two mess-up places. From the Nile to Kenya railhead, and between Kenya and Northern Rhodesia. Climate is blamed. But the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Africa authorities have as many problems to face. Some people have a positive delight in doing things the hard way. If they arrive at an outpost with a ton of baggage, instead of seeking out means of wheeled transport, they try to carry the stuff themselves in a spirit of numskull heroics that is best described as the anti-wheel outlook.

The existing railways could be united. Seeing that they are all in the sterling area there is no financial difficulty. The Australians had the same trouble, with similar distances, and got over it. But in Africa transport costs and poor communications kill trade. A co-ordinating committee has been suggested as a solution, with representatives from each government. Do such committees ever get anything useful done? Let us assume so, with grave misgivings. Had the Romans settled in Africa two thousand years ago their first plan would have been to build good roads up and down and across the continent. Two thousand years later we have not got to their common-sense point of view. The Soviets built the roads from the Caucasus to the Ukraine, although there was neither stone nor other materials available in the districts to be covered, and the whole project sounded uneconomic.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SANDS RUN OUT

People again ; the ranchers' welcome ; of Thinking Big.

WE put in a lot of work in the later stages of the run, as the indications were more and more promising. There is nothing like success for injecting new energy into tired men.

Our relationship with each other had changed. The polite formality had given way to casual shouts and open arguments. Having become friends, we could afford to dispense with such civilised amenities as listening in silence to the other man. We interrupted each other with loud bawlings and impossible threats, ending in a good laugh. Each of us stuck to his original thesis, strengthened by lack of support. That was on the surface. Below we had all modified our original views as a result of the differences in outlook and mutual respect.

The Africans had learned even more. We had made them dissatisfied for life. I considered this a good thing. They had learned how to travel on wheels, and how to earn more than ten shillings a month. How to guard against the elements, how to drink coffee and tea and fancier brews, how good tobacco can be, as compared with any old dried leaves, and the advantages of European and American clothes as compared with the sewn sacks and tawdry garments of the Sikh traders. They had kettles and tin mugs and bags of sugar of their own, and dozens of little things that would mean a lot in their homes, such as exotic-coloured ties. Above all, they had the immense prestige of having been away on a long journey and having seen so many places. The Hereros had the experience of being leaders. The Kaffirs had been treated as human beings, and had acquired new skills. They must have learned a lot about cooking from us, although our emphasis on cleanliness must have seemed very fussy and unnecessary. Before they met us the Kaffirs knew how to carry half a hundredweight on their heads, for thirty miles. Faced with the same problems in the desert, they had learned how to shift half a ton, with a few gadgets and a bit of co-operative work.

Some people might say it is a shocking thing to upset the old way of life and make men discontented. Men are, however, only too liable to sit back unless there is someone to stir them up. The trouble

with the missionaries was not that they uprooted the old way of life, but that they gave a lot of people the idea that to enjoy anything was sinful, and the African, with his love of laughter, could never catch on. The way the natives like to think is very much like that of the Australian opal-bashers in northern New South Wales—"Live in hope, if you die in despair."

We got the impression that the natives did not make too good a job of looking after themselves, on their own. Nine out of ten of them suffer from worms, and they have few ideas of making artificial light between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. For thousands of years men spent twelve hours a day in darkness! What a performance!

Now that we were getting near the end of the trail, we discussed the next steps. We could have called on the government people to the east, make our numbers, and been dragged about from one party to another. This did not appeal to any of us. We looked like hobos, and had no wish to "climb into borrowed monkey suits," as Bob put it. There would be hours of sitting and talking. I could see that most of the weight of speech would fall on me, and I was not keen. I seem to be on the defensive at these sessions, and I can never see any point in them. One's hosts always assume habits that are not congenial. I would rather sit on a mountain opening a tin than attend any house party, where people talk to each other, punctuating the conversation with nervous giggles and adopting the fashionable façade of mock modesty that prevents anyone finding out what the other person is, or does.

At dinner parties hostesses have a distressing trick of saying, at any lull in the conversation, "We have Mr. Brown with us tonight, who is going to tell us all kinds of exciting things about his adventures. He has just returned from er . . . the wilds, and he has been looking for . . . What was it you were looking for, Mr. Brown?" "As I sit stupefied, with my mouth full, some bright creature twitters, "Oh, yes, Mr. Brown, do tell us. I love anything like that."

This is, of course, the mullarkey. People don't want to hear anything of the kind. The kind of story they want to hear is about a single paragraph in length, about how you shot an elephant with the last shot in your .28 rifle, right through the brain, and how it toppled off the causeway on top of another elephant beneath, and crushed it to death. Alternatively, they will listen to someone who says, "Mam, I have no hesitation in saying that the journey we have just made will go down to history as one of the great pioneer voyages. Yes, mam, a great pioneer voyage, and I want you all to rise for a moment and drink a toast to one of the people who made it possible—E. Lockerback Brodie, of the Lockerback Knitwear and Union Suit Company. A great man, mam, a man with Vision."

Fortunately for me, Peggy is no more addicted to the horrors of public life than I am. From our point of view, anyone who has more, or thinks he has more, than six friends is in public life. Our definition of a friend is someone to whom you are prepared to lend money, or sign a bail bond.

At the end of each day's run, and before the light faded, I wrote up my journal, in the style of a governess in Jane Austen's day. There were gaps due to illness and conviviality, but the daily discipline had its reward in that I never felt frustrated or at a loss. A man who is working has no time for contemplating his navel, and with most of us this is a good thing. Whatever may be said against the literary art, it engenders self-discipline.

Peggy was always at my side to warn me against the dangers of speculative enquiry and the tendency of desert travellers to write in the declamatory style of a fourth-rate Koran. Things that might seem normal to me, she insisted, might be offensive to others. She was perhaps mindful of a tribe in the Congo who still boil their dead relatives for many hours into a thick soup, which is drunk with relish by all hands. While I did not regard such behaviour as normal, it seemed an amusing quirk. My remarks on the possibilities of a new canning industry in the arca were not, however, well received.

Africa is not a land for the squeamish, and there is often a good laugh to be had from the most bizarre situations. I shall never forget H. W. Tilman's account of how he drove a car, with a 200 lbs. elephant foetus in the back seat, smelling to high heaven, to find a place where it could be decently preserved in the interests of science. Tilman is a wonderful man, with a capacity for understatement that is sensational, even in England. He it was who climbed Kilimanjaro alone, having discovered that there is a receptacle on the summit, as big as a solicitor's deed box, in which successful climbers leave their visiting cards, as at an Embassy.

The Tilman-Shipton team climbed Mount Kenya, Kilimanjaro, and the Mountains of the Moon while they were in Africa, but few Britishers are aware of these exploits, outside mountaineering circles. Tilman went further. He rode across Africa on a bicycle, from Kenya to the Cameroons. In some countries he would have been fêted on his return and loaded with honours and honorary degrees, if not with grants-in-aid from the government. But not in Britain.

Luke had met a few wandering experts in Africa, who had returned to their own countries to write scarifying accounts of Blackest Basutoland and Grimmest Griqualand, after a week or two of hotel safari. His opinion of the experts was usually expressed in short Afrikaans words we did not understand.

The quickest way to make a name in Europe or North America, according to Luke, was to write a booklet with some such title as *On the lip of the Crater or Africa—Maelstrom of Misrule*, full of statistics about rinderpest and erosion, with a supplement showing comparative wage-rates in Detroit, London, and Pondoland, and a few pictures of piccaninnies outside grass huts. A million educated morons were always available to buy such things, thinking that a few columns of figures was a proof of scientific approach.

Bob went further, envisaging a series of booklets, covering three or four continents, to be called the *Downtrodden Library*, and embracing everything from Albanian atrocities to Zulu zoophagy.

"Bob would be no good at it," said Peggy. "He laughs too much. To do anything with the intelligentsia you have to be a miserable kind of creature. If you haven't got ulcers you've got to look as if you had them. People think you have a mission then, and call you sincere."

Bob admitted the truth of this. "All the biggest creeps I know are called sincere. Even being a big success wouldn't pay you for having to stand their company."

* * * *

As we neared the Bechuanaland border we came across isolated ranches and farms. For some reason we were not too happy about seeing human dwelling places again. Bob admitted that he was dreading the sight of a newspaper.

The return to civilization was thus something of an anti-climax instead of being a relief. Even the natives did not show the enthusiasm that might have been expected. It was as if we had been living in a warm little world of our own, and the holiday was ending. We were to re-enter the world of permits and forms and formalities and coins and currencies and queueing up. The strutting big shots would again be the suppliants, studying office doors for the official hours of business. Guns could no longer be used without permission, and landowners would have to be asked before a tent-peg was stuck in the ground. It is true that all the laws and permits are said to be for our own good, and to prevent anarchy and disorder, and the bullying of the tyrant. Maybe we were affected by the heat. Our first reaction was to say, "Good heavens—people!" and "What a shame!" and "Oh, no!"

There were natives seeking jobs and presents, and piccaninnies who could run for miles until they got a hand-out, but the more important locals had other things to worry about.

The farmers were nice friendly people, but their talk was of things

such as foot and mouth disease, far more important out there than the death of Stalin. They could be said to follow the course of European politics with keen indifference. Far more important was the efficiency of the Veterinary Department, which was highly praised, and the hoped-for Crown lands development schemes. About these there were wildly conflicting theories, but I was sure that a lot would be done over the next seven years. A geophysical map of the area was in preparation, and that was bound to lead to results.

I was a bit off the mark in the amount of capital I thought necessary to run a ranch out there, judging from the big sums talked about, but it is all a matter of background. In the company of mining men who talk airily about sinking fifty thousand pounds here to see if there is anything worth while, and fifty thousand somewhere else next year, I have to keep quiet while my mind adjusts itself to all the ciphers. I am reminded of Erskine Caldwell's story about thinking three fifty was not much of a price for some of his work, when he was first starting out. He thought the editor meant three dollars fifty, being accustomed himself to think in such microscopic amounts.

The white settlers along the Zambesi and the Gwaai rivers and in the Tati concession are go-getter types, who believe in trying anything once or maybe twice. They have to be. All kinds of terrible things can happen to them. Tsetse, drought, floods and fever. Everyone is air and radio-minded, and as everyone is accustomed to responsibility of some kind, if only through running native labour, there is a tendency to behave in a way that might be called slightly larger than life in the cold countries.

Instead of skulking shamefacedly into a room this kind of man makes an entrance. It was a bit like being out with people whose photographs are always in the public prints. After being with them a few days you recognize why they are so well known. They take presents along with them, buy drinks for everyone, and shout hard if they are ignored. Stuck in a corner with someone obscure, they will start a song or give a few imitations. They have a few parlour tricks, too, such as eating a banana in its skin with their hands tied behind their backs, and peeling an orange with one hand while reciting a poem backwards. In such company my mouse-like twitterings passed unnoticed, like a Moral Rearmament team at a Bump Supper.

It must be nice to be completely unselfconscious, like this. I got my own back on one man by saying, "Down, Rover!" but I really envied him. Such high spirits must surely spring from a real love of humanity, and a wish to cheer up the Sad Sacks. It is a strain to keep it up for long, though. People who have to wear a smile all day are entitled to all the medals they can get.

Farmers pressed gifts of livestock on us, and I kept thinking, "This is illegal," but it wasn't. That was my English training. I kept thinking that if I took a pig it would mean giving up my bacon ration for a year, and having a lot of palavers at the Food Office. It was not easy to recall that bacon was unrationed, and there were no food offices for six thousand miles. Every time I sat down to a big steak I had a guilty feeling, liable to choke if anybody burst into the room with a loud halloo.

These ranchers and scientists were widely travelled. They were as familiar, or seemed to be, with London, Paris and New York as with Bulawayo, and thought in Bob's terms, of moving from continent to continent rather than from place to place.

Having been recently in Europe, I was expected to know all about the latest doings of the big shots, and my confession that I knew none of them was poorly received, being evidence of a misspent youth.

"Can't understand what you fellows have been doing in England all this time," said one farmer. "Don't seem to be getting anywhere, do you?"

"No."

He relented. "You seem to have one or two decent ideas. Why don't you put them up to the government?"

"You mean the government in London?"

"Yes. Go and see them. Tell them."

"Who, me?"

"Yes. Insist on seeing them. You'll get some action."

"You can't go to England and demand to see the government?"

"Why not? You're paying their salaries. Keep at them. Keep bothering them. These fellows never see anybody with the right ideas. If they won't let you in you can always waylay them. Find out where they eat."

"Then what?"

"Go and sit beside them. The English are always frightened of a scene. They'll listen to you, mark my words. Once you've got them listening, you're in."

"I don't know how the members of the government feed, but I doubt if they sit down together at a big table like an officers' mess."

"You're just making difficulties. Get at the big men. Don't bother with the small fry. That's the way I do things."

"Have you ever tried this?"

"Not yet. If I want to see anyone round here, I go and see him. I'd do the same in London. Who are these fellows, anyway? You're not scared of them, are you?"

Peggy met a man who was under the impression that she had come to join us by rail and bus from the east coast. When she said she had

come from the west coast she got a pitying look, as it was assumed she was one of those women who don't know east from west. This man confided to Peggy that the men she was with could do with a haircut.

On a trip to England, he said, he had seen hundreds of young men who resembled sheepdogs, with shaggy coats and unbrushed hair hanging over their eyes.

It was a pity that we were unable to answer the questions asked us about some Kalahari mysteries. The huge rocks north of Tsane, for instance. We had not even seen these, and knew nothing about them. The lost city—another subject on which we were mines of ignorance. People at isolated posts. We had not struck them, either. It is always like this when one returns from the wilds. People contrive to put you in the wrong. There are tut-tuts when you confess you have not shot any animal weighing less than yourself, and gleams in some people's eyes. It is clear that they have resolved that somehow, by hook or by crook, they are determined to bring you face to face with a lion, preferably a big black-maned job, and very hungry. This will undoubtedly provide them with a good story to tell about you, and with luck one with a slightly macabre flavour.

We were told of areas where lions abounded, of places where herds of buffalo, slightly crazy, could be found, and of one very good spot where rhinos might charge from two directions at once, and where snakes twenty feet long waited on trees for the unwary. It was assumed that I would be eager to set off for such districts at once to make a name for myself. When I showed no enthusiasm, I was advised to try some big-game fishing off the east coast. Enormous manta rays, killer sharks, and poisonous squids were there, in horrific numbers, it was stated. Even when bathing it was possible to stand on something that was guaranteed to make you writhe in agony in a few minutes. It seemed to me that a sensible man would make tracks for the nearest town, at the double, and lock himself in his room until the next aircraft was ready to take off.

During the war, we had a colonel who said to me, on the eve of my going on leave, "I thought I'd tell you, before you go, there's an assault course coming off. Through barbed wire, under fire from live ammunition, then fording a river, then up some poles in full kit, and along a plank over some mines, then a drop, and a problem—climbing a twelve-foot wall with the enemy on the other side. I know you wouldn't like to miss it. We're timing everyone through." The obvious answer was "Whose side are you on?" but people in responsible jobs are easily upset if their mad keenness has not infected those around them. Levity is discouraged. I said, "You have forgotten the problems of crawling in full pack through a carpet of netting." This delayed things long enough for me to escape.

There were lots and lots of problems connected with our remaining stores and equipment, but they were easily settled. Health had stayed better than we dared to expect, and as a result the medical stores were not much depleted. We were particularly elated at the success of the anti-fever measures, and sent reports back to the people concerned.

In the outlying territory, on the way to the Zambesi, trade seems to be in the hands of a few Greek storemen, who live their celibate and lonely lives dedicated to the pursuit of a thick bank balance. How the Greeks can live under these conditions nobody knows. They have a talent in this direction, as witness the big all-male community at Mount Athos.

One of the Greeks had made a fortune already, gone back to Europe lost it in the convulsions of war and invasion, and was back to make another. It was nothing, he said, recalling the case of Henry Ward, who made nearly a million pounds, and contrived to get through the lot in five years, and die broke. Mr. Ward was just as good at getting rid of it as he was at getting hold of it. Maybe, said the Greek, there was some connection. Did I not know such people myself? It was true that I knew a man during World War II occupying a menial position in the officers' mess, who took taxis everywhere when he went out, and insisted on eating at the best restaurants in London, although he had no job to go back to, and earned only a few shillings a day. Five years after the war he was earning a millionaire's income.

Chastened by all this talk of millions and the life gracious, we pursued our humble way, wondering what it was that we lacked that our lives were bounded by petty considerations, such as being able to afford a new suit of clothes. The men who thought Big bought theirs by the dozen. What was it, we asked each other, that stopped us thinking Big? While we scratched about from one ship to another trying to get low fares or work-your-passage rates, there were men who flew through the skies smoking Corona-Coronas, studying stock market reports and cornering commodities. Maybe if we didn't spend so much time trying to economise, we would all be better off? On this great thought we jolted along some terrible tracks. I tried to bring a ray of sunshine by saying, "It's not much use earning a lot nowadays. They take it off you. We're supposed to think in terms of public service and not private gain." This brought a chorus of "Yeah!" and "Now he tells me!"

CHAPTER XV

A CHAPTER OF IGNORANCE

Languages, tribal customs, dances, drums ; the dream we dreamed.

I speak no African languages, and made no effort to learn any, apart from the few words necessary to carry on work, and daily routine. There is much to be said for Sebastian Snow's theory that loud clear English will carry one anywhere in the world. He has the advantage over me, of course, that his English is both louder and clearer.

I made no study of tribal customs or rites.

Whenever possible, I got out of the area in which a tribal dance was being organized. I dislike giving presents to strangers, but was always prepared to do so on condition that no tribal dance took place, or ceremonial drum-beating. As for native music, I find most of it an earache, with its North American counterpart. What pleasure can there be in the mewling of cats, the crying of babies, and the barking of dogs ?

There are tribes which lay on tremendous celebrations, with drums beating all day and night, and men dressed up like birds and animals, cavorting and stamping. This is believed by some "authorities" to have a hidden significance. But if the neighbours in London organized such a demonstration people would send for the police, once the novelty had worn off.

People have short memories. Many young men and women in the West today assume that the black African has been exploited by the European adventurer, but for whom he would be living in peace. This is a fantasy. Until the whites went there, slavery, murder, torture, and injustice were taken for granted. Until the turn of this century the Arab slave-traders had control of the eastern seaboard in the Zanzibar area, and their authority ran far inland. There were Arab sultanates in the heart of Africa.

The native chiefs themselves, full of *bhang* and beer, killed people for fun, and ordered mutilations for trifling infractions. There were pyramids of skulls on the west coast. In the east Tchaka was the great name, following the conquests of his *impis*. Mzilikazi (Path of Blood), one of Tchaka's lieutenants, stole the treasures after one expedition, and decided not to go back to his boss. This was the beginning of the Matabele. Mzilikazi made war on every tribe around. His son, Lobengula, carried on the family tradition, despite

professions of Christianity. Lobengula amused himself by having his victims tied up near his pet crocodiles and watching the reptiles dine. Another diversion was to shoot unfortunate passers-by from the door of his hut, in Caribbean pirate style, to see who was the lucky man, in their phrase. Nobody expected to live long, and few did, except the Bushmen, who were protected by the deserts.

The very essence of life in pre-white Africa was the absence of order and stability. Apart from the ravages of fever, insects, and wild animals, slavers or invaders might arrive at any moment. Over centuries the habits of debauchery and laziness affected the entire population. The more intelligent and energetic thought little of a trek of twelve hundred miles or so to get a bit of peace in some remote fastness. The story of the white expeditions is the struggle of the leaders against the lies, procrastination, and laziness of the bearers, with a few fine exceptions. On the route to the interior the petty chiefs seized every opportunity of bleeding the visitors of their possessions, and exacting tribute in cloth, beads, and weapons. The journals of the "openers of roads" exhibit the same story of splendid aims against a background of double-dealing and disappointment.

How can order be maintained, and a civilization established? A handful of well-armed, determined men can maintain an empire for a lifetime with *sjambok* and gun, but to build anything lasting love and friendship must be gained, and a chieftainship based on technical superiority. There are two methods, equally effective. The American with his machines—the new wizard—and the white African or European with his paternal outlook and practical objectives, including black citizenship.

Is fear a weapon that our tropical administrators have discarded too quickly? Nobody in a responsible job dare utter such words today! But are they silly? Is it not better, as a boss without the gift of affection, to have one's followers admiring and on their toes, rather than thinking the *bwana* is another sucker?

* * * *

Many African savages are afraid of the camera. They had no wish to be photographed. Primitive magic? Afraid of losing their faces if the whites took them away? It is not as simple as all that. In a sense they would be lost, for the simple man studies expressions and can often guess the intention of the invader. What was our intention but to remove his old way of life, to uproot it completely, and with the new machines to create something the wilderness must abhor?

As for the preservation of the Africa of old, my wife and I had a dream that had nothing to do with saving the spotted hyena for posterity.

We imagined the bulldozers cutting tracks through the scrub and bush towards the bore-hole sites. Then the lorries with the native labourers to make the clearings and airstrips. Six lorries and twenty labourers would be enough. Then the huts for the white engineers and mechanics, and the kitchen. Then the sinking of the borehole after the arrival of the engineer. Everyone working fast, paid on results, not on time. Every minute of daylight to be utilized, as there would be no electric light at first. Then the rig, going higher and higher—dangerous work in the blazing sun. After the boring tower, the machine house, tool shed and the store room. Then the engines, tractors, driving wheels, cables and chains, the dynamo and the wires. There would be casualties, accidents. Millions of insects would die on the electric bulbs as they shone through the night. There would be no peace in the desert. The noise would drive the wild life away, deeper and deeper into the remote areas. The stupider ones who stayed near the camp would be killed.

When water was struck, it would mean that up to twelve thousand extra acres more could be brought into use. The men who had worked there, and tasted success, would be changed. They would have learned the power of plans in the hands of the engineers, and the miracles wrought by books, and the discipline that makes men work when they feel lazy or ill. They would, in turn, change other people. No woman, no child, would escape the changes. Even the air would be different. It would be cooler. In time, the climate of whole areas would be altered. This is no fantasy, but a piece of history from the newer states of the American Union and from the great irrigation schemes of the British in Africa and Asia. This kind of achievement is real, and marks the most worth-while of revolutions.

* * * *

Our daily routine was so interesting and varied that we had little time to study the ways of the natives, even those who accompanied us. There is a self-centredness about living close to the earth that inhibits study. In the great heat of Africa we felt more like sleeping between midday and three o'clock. Work was a burden. In Rhodesia they say a woman loses her looks and her nerves if she does not sleep during the afternoon. If we fought hard to keep awake, the Hereros and the Kaffirs knew better. They could sleep anywhere, at any time, and did so when they saw a chance. They lay



Parallel passage in the temple



Black rhino



A fine buck

down, relaxed in every muscle, as cunning as foxes in choosing an earth.

On a typical afternoon, if we were not on the move, I would be soaking an anti-snake lariat in carbolic, while Peggy mended the mosquito net and Bob gathered rock specimens. Luke would be in the bush on a *recce*, with a Kaffir carrying his rifle, skinning-knife, and axe. Jacobus would be sitting down watching one of the Kaffirs work, while Martinus scoured the district for the rest of the boys, who had a habit of disappearing into the void and turning up near meal time. At no time did we function with one hundred per cent efficiency. Nor does anything else in the whole continent. The boys are not hostile to the whites, it is just that they express their individuality by dodging the column and scamping a job.

If they heard me coming everyone seized some utensil and started cleaning and polishing, as busy as ants. In the desert one can put one's ear to the sand and hear approaching footsteps quite a long way off, so "miking" is easy.

There was ignorance to deal with, and the vast difference in standards. The dull-witted boys are the best workers, once they get the hang of things. The intelligent ones pick things up quickly, but are always devising schemes to put themselves in front.

When we all worked together, on such a job as careening the lorries, everything went well. Clouds of dust flew up, and masses of debris scraped off. Order appeared from chaos. That was something everyone could understand. But Peggy's insistence on boiling water and the use of nasty-tasting disinfectants seemed crazy to the Africans. They were afraid of the thermos flasks, with their magical properties. They liked a bit of buffoonery at work, no matter how grave the crisis. A day without a laugh was a sad day indeed for them. Such days were few, for we laughed a great deal at each other, especially in the closing stages, and talked incessantly.

I had a shock explaining the springbok cooker, that I considered a masterpiece, to Jacobus. He knew far more about it than I did, and made a few grave corrections to my careful statements. Later on, I surprised him sitting beside it, asleep on his hunkers. He sprang into life, pretending to look for something, and produced a grimy rag. It was so like the old army game I said nothing. I remembered our own reactions only too well, how one man had carried a bucket to and fro for days to avoid a job, and how one man, a tobacconist in civil life, had carried his aversion to work so far that he hid within a heap of coke whenever a sergeant-major threatened to appear.

We had a trooper, as good as any Kaffir at the disappearing trick, who once vanished off a parade ground in the full glare of the top brass, disappearing into the Tidworth woods to keep a more urgent appointment as the squadron turned about.

Listening to Luke bawling out the Kaffirs as a bunch of scruffy *skellums* I could hear the echoes of distant voices that had addressed me in just such tones as a disgrace to the regiment, and even to the whole army.

The slogan of the natives was "Why get up in the morning if you have the strength to lie in bed?"

They did not look on us as nice kind *baascs*, but as lunatics who happened to be in charge, in the same way as G.I.'s used to think of the Pentagou. Ants in the bread? Why make all that fuss? Put the bread on the fire and the ants will run off. Wash the pots over and over again until they are clean? Why? No insects on them, only a few stains and bits of dirt. Why boil water and then let it cool again? Why not leave it cool as it is, and save a lot of grief? Why save bits of soap when there are dozens of long bars in the box? Fish-moths in the flour? There always are. Sugar-ants in the sugar? Cooking will kill them. Why collect brushwood and tinder when a good gollop of petrol will get things burning nicely?

My insistence on anti-malaria pills for everyone on Sunday morning, with clockwork regularity, and inspection of sores on hands, feet, and elsewhere, was accepted with good humour, but needles made them nervous.

It is the custom for natives to groan as they carry a package, each man trying to outdo his neighbour in the mimicry of exhaustion. One man we called Larry, after Laurence Olivier, gave blood-curdling grunts and held his stomach whenever he had to lift a bucket of water or anything heavier than a shovel. When Peggy rang the bell for "Come and get it!" Larry dropped his load as if it were red-hot and streaked for his mealie-meal like a greyhound from Trap One.

Sometimes when I carried a rifle or a box of ammunition I gave a few grunts and groans in the manner of Larry, pretending to retch and rolling my eyes. This performance was useful especially when we were walking behind Larry, as it put everyone in good humour, and there would be no more "miking" or "laking" for an hour or two.

We shocked our natives by the amount of work we insisted on doing ourselves. I left the rough to the blacks, but we often did our own cooking, although this is against tradition. Cooks are very difficult people to deal with, and are very jealous of their territory, but Peggy is a cook from way back, with the stand-no-nonsense methods of a Scots nannie. In the end tradition had to give way. Far from leaving our workers in peace, we got them cracking at all hours, to conform to our way of life, modified by the blazing enemy aloft. They only respected us the more for this. Comparing notes

with other people, we had a fine group of men, and far less trouble than arises in the average farm-house with a dozen boys to do the work.

* * * *

Much has been written on the drums of Africa, and the significance of the messages they convey. But in the Kaokoveld the Hereros keep the Mahimba subject tribe beating drums all day and night to keep the birds off the maize, and the elephant and baboon out of range. In other parts of Africa I feel sure the drums and tomtoms often have no other significance. Sometimes it is the kind of noise made by children at play. Watch any children in the western world when visitors come, and they will show off, make a noise, or draw attention to themselves in some way. The scientist would never think of making much of that in the way of social significance; it is too familiar, and everyone can see examples, in any house, any day. So why bother with primitive peoples and the hidden meaning, which is often no more than one of the fundamental principles of life—the injection of more ego into one's cosmos.

The city-dweller and the farm mechanic are in the vanguard of progress. They should look ahead, not behind to the brutish, narrow life of our remote ancestors. The New Yorker in his luxury flat may have a sense of guilt about his comfort while so many are in trouble, but the solution is in his own hands. There is no need to look afar for a pastoral, idyllic society without worry and competition. It doesn't exist, and it never did.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RHODESIAS

The party breaks up ; Victoria Falls ; the Rider Haggard city of Zimbabwe.

ONCE we had got across the Southern Rhodesia border, we knew our job was finished. The time had come to split up, dispose of the saleable assets, and call it a day. Peggy and I were going to have a look at Zimbabwe and Inyanga, but Luke and Bob had other plans. We had heard so many treasure stories that they were keen to try their luck. I had a list of a dozen possible locations, in none of which I had any confidence, and they had as many more. Ancient natives came to us with tales of wars that were like echoes from forgotten histories.

We had many discussions. We had come so far with only minor mishaps—a few blowouts, choked carburettors, a few stores missing. Luke and Bob thought it would be good fun to have a go at one or two of the treasure stories. No doubt it would, but so many people have lost their health on these ventures. I was unwilling to push our luck too far, and not satisfied with the big claims of the storytellers. But no one can be sure in Africa. My wife's idea was that there are many treasures in southern Africa, but they will be stumbled on by accident. The searchers nearly always come to a bad end, or lose their all. Fortunes are there to be made, but for some strange reason the planners never make them.

Take the 1949 treasure! Sam Mtaung, a native, found 16,000 sovereigns, minted for the Transvaal Republic, sold the lot for between £3 and £4 a coin, and kept the money, Mr. Justice de Beer awarding him the treasure after a long hearing at Harrismith, Orange Free State, in April of that year. Mtaung had been a labourer, working near the bridge at Botmansbank, near Frankfort, O.F.S., when he stumbled on the cache in a hole. The burghers had left it there when retreating from the British, and the diggers had either forgotten the location or been killed. It is very easy to forget a site among the kopjes and in the bush. So many places look alike, and there is hundreds of miles of wild country. I am glad to say Mtaung put the money into circulation. No one could call him a hoarder. He bought a big American car, several houses, a few shops, and a factory, and went to Durban in the style of Lobengula the Second. I hope he compared notes in Durban with the former Indian fisher-

man, Mukerji Patel, who found £18,000 worth of precious stones inside a temple gong, washed up on Durban's Brighton Beach. Patel was looking for bait at the time. As a small earthquake seemed likely in the Indian district after news of his discovery got around, he took the stones to the local bank manager, who had them valued, and put everything on a businesslike and Bristol fashion basis. Patel got half the value from the benevolent (?) government, which sucked the rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and jade into its hungry maw. No doubt this treasure came from a broken-up East Indian offshore.

In 1933 the Van Graan brothers got £1,000 worth of gold in a single morning from the Mapungubwe kopje, a hundred feet high archaeological site in the Northern Transvaal. How much more the government people found I cannot say, but it amounted to several hundred-weights. Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr, Minister of the Interior, financed the Archaeological Committee of Pretoria University to look after things. In 1950 Professor Louw said that treasure seekers had been around the site, known locally as the Hill of Jackals, digging in all directions, but no one talked afterwards about results. I believe they got a few samples, maybe a golden rhinoceros or so—there was at least one of these on the kopje the first day. *The Keeper of the Mint* for South Africa could no doubt shed light on this hoard, but the government departments seem reticent about the affair. The tough boys across the Portuguese East border were very upset about this business, as they had some inside information about Mapungubwe, and a small expedition could have looted the whole site without leaving as much as a thank you note.

Bob and Luke went off with Jacobus and Martinus, transport and stores, to try their luck, promising to keep a big stone for us if they came to grips with Lobengula's hoard. We paid off the remaining four porters as soon as we reached the railhead, and I gave them their fares back to South-west, although they seemed in no hurry to rejoin their suffering wives. The African takes little heed of the morrow, and I guessed an almighty celebration lay ahead for them. I wrote out some very flamboyant references, so that their absence would be explained, and they would have no difficulty in getting another job. It was hard to fathom their minds. Serious things did not bother them, but a trifle might bring tears. Moods changed from day to day, and a white man cannot get to the bottom of it. Perhaps after laughing at one of his jokes his bearers will fall into a sulk. Unwittingly he may have sat on a tree-stump that is a tribal fetish, or made a gesture that has a special significance. We must not forget that however strange are their ways, our own are even more mysterious to the natives.

Before I went to the Rhodesias I heard a lecture in England on the area, but learned little. The audience did not seem sure where the country was (this often happens at such lectures), why it was split in two, and what kind of governments it had (on this last point I am still a bit doubtful, like most Rhodesians). In any case, I always find my attention wandering after five minutes of any lecture. I keep wondering who the other people are on the platform. The preparations are always so drab, and the people attending seem rather ashamed of being there—culture has always been under a cloud in Britain.

I started counting the clichés, worthy of a report of a small-town wedding. I recalled the speech composed entirely of nouns one man gave at an open-air fête when the loud-speaker system broke down. He went down well, too. "Ship of State—storm—lightning—economic blizzard—(*marine gestures*)—children of the poor—widows—orphans—(*tremolo*)—unemployment—hardship—misery—depression—(*slumping* shoulders)—landlords—(*hiss*)—capitalists (*fortissimo*)." People came away from this gathering saying, "He's right, you know," and "He put it very well."

Even when I take copious notes at a lecture I seem unable to absorb much. Motion pictures are different—I can seep up all kinds of knowledge from them, and could probably pass an examination tomorrow on the tactics at the Little Big Horn, and maybe the Big Big Horn too. Indian Scouts, the Panhandle, the Bad Lands of Dakota—I have been lapping this up for years in the friendly dark, sucking excitedly at ice-creams.

Sometimes the people who give lectures have prosaic, un-Hollywood minds. They start off, "Bongoland, as most of you know, is situated north-east of Tsetse and slightly south of Tzotzi. The government is a very interesting experiment in tripartite native semi-partnership, with right of appeal to A.A.C.C.C. and a revision committee or commission, dependent on the year, meeting in alternative capitals biennially." This throws me, however simple it may be to the unlettered Bantu.

The lecturer plunges on, describing his duty call on the government, which sounds terribly dull. Then "we headed first for the Mganga country as you might expect" (smile). Everyone around me is nodding dutifully. This may be big stuff, but it is right over my head. In a trance I hear words like Oborono and Mzilikazi, and at once imagine an ebony chief squatting outside his hut, giving orders to the warrior captains and the wizards. "The white man has spoken through his box that thunders. Now I, Oborono, say the tips of our spears will be red as the dawn on the snows of Kili-manjaro before we pay income tax. This palaver is finished."

By the time these pleasing pictures have faded, I have fortunately missed a lot of the lecture. Nevertheless, merely going there taught me something, and that was to avoid the senior officials, who had not provided the lecturer with a single story. That meant best suits and monkey-suits could be left behind with a good heart, despite my wife's complaint about being dragged through Africa with a man who looked like a fugitive from Alcoholics Anonymous.

A journalist friend, who had been condemned to write a piece on titaniferous oxide, although his devotion was for football and boxing, came to me one night in the hope that I might have some much-needed clue.

After we had exhausted our stock of knowledge of titanium and ilmenite and suchlike improbabilities, we turned to Africa. I explained my lack of knowledge, and the journalist invited me to a meeting due that night, on Central Africa, about which he was well posted. I took my wife along, she having advised me that there was nothing good at the local movie house.

The speakers were of various sizes and colours, like the audience. The speakers were all very anxious about something, but I could not quite make out what it was. A protest was registered against something or other, and most people went happily home. A large man who had sat behind me lingered to say, "You and your missus want to give the speaker a chance, mate. You was whispering, nudging, and sniggering all through. If you haven't come to hear the case put, you want to stop away, you do. Behaving like a couple of silly kids." With this broadside, he walked off, in high dudgeon, as they say, leaving us to say, "You want to hear the case put, you do" to each other. Maybe he was right. We went home, still ignorant, and under the impression that most of the Central Africans were now in London on free scholarships from the various governments that were oppressing them.

* * * *

We liked the Rhodesias. When we arrived the two sections of the country were discussing political changes, and politics are always very boring to people who are not directly concerned. The Rhodesians we met assumed that we would be on their side, or rather on the side of whoever was laying down the law in that particular house. I found it best to nod and smile, trying to sidetrack the conversation into more immediate objects, such as the price of things, or some local scandal that sounded promising. This technique, so familiar to women, was as successful as ever. I am sure I got a reputation for intelligence from both sides by tactical nods at critical moments,

without understanding anything. Conversations used to go like this . . .

Farmer: "As for that crook that spoke last week, he should be shot. Don't you agree?"

Brown: "Of course."

Farmer: "And the African Affairs Council! Did you ever hear of such a mockery?"

Brown: "It's absurd."

Farmer: "I'm glad you think so. Every decent man must think the same. It's the same all over. The wrong people in public life. But we're not finished yet. Oh, no. Wait a bit. You'll see some fun. We'll be political tsetse flies."

Brown: "I'm sure you will. Talking of tsetse, do you have much trouble here?"

Farmer: "Trouble? We have nothing else. Tsetse—we've got seventy million acres of it, north and south. We get locusts one year, army worms the next, and the third year a good crop. That's when the bottom falls out of the market. Fourth year the locusts are back, but the tobacco crop's good. That's the time your leaves turn black. It's a wonderful life, farming out here. You lose money every year, but some years are worse than others, that's the best way to describe it."

I could not discover a single farmer who was making a profit. When I asked them why they stayed, they said it was rage, and their uncertainty about their own reactions if things went well one year, by mistake. It was obvious that they enjoyed their struggles, but it was also clear that farming and planting was as big a gamble as their national lottery, run by the state, offering huge prizes for ten-shilling tickets.

These men and their wives looked the picture of health, and their children were much sturdier than those of Europe. The country is, of course, a boy's paradise, with many youngsters owning a gun and driving a car at fourteen or so. The settlers had been startled during World War II by the appearance of scrawny, ill-fed, undernourished service men from Britain, with bad teeth and a hangdog appearance. The children out there had been brought up to think that everything from the Old Country was wonderful, and had visualised an Englishman as a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed, handsome creature, wide-shouldered, slim-waisted, devoted to sport and keeping a stiff upper lip on all occasions. The sight of the little Englishmen, chasing the native girls and whistling after the white girls, and fraternizing openly with the native boys, was a terrific shock. Some of the men proved practically illiterate, and they could not be invited to houses without embarrassing situations.

The natives, quick to realize the comedy of the situation, which appealed to their keen sense of humour, took full advantage. All this was not a matter of snobbery. No one could be less snobbish than a South African or a Rhodesian. It was just a matter of plain facts. What the Rhodesians could not understand, although they made tremendous efforts, was how sixty years of free education in Britain had produced corner-boys, who did not even know the name of their Prime Minister in some cases, while in the wilds, with everything to be paid for, and schools hundreds of miles from a farm, the Rhodesian children were familiar with the classics, two or more languages, and could, besides, ride, shoot, and boss a gang of natives.

It was all sorted out in time, but the impact of Europe upon New Africa was a profound shock to well-established traditions.

I felt sorry for some of the women on the remoter plantations. Their life must be a continual battle, without any social consolations. Southern Africa is a man's world, and there is something of a Victorian atmosphere of ignoring the women for ninety per cent of the day, and offering an occasional little gift as consolation. In the big cities, such as Salisbury and Bulawayo, there is an active social life, but the men seemed blind to the need for a fuller life for their wives and daughters. In this respect the life of the women of the lower-paid workers at home was much freer, if no happier.

There is a fair leavening of knights and "Honourables" from the old country, but many of Rhodesia's moguls started life in very humble circumstances in Scotland and Ireland. As always, it is the man without the advantages of birth who makes the money. The man who knows too much sees all sides of the question, and cannot take risks, lacking that little edge of super-self-confidence. Jacob Factor and Moe Annanberg, who knocked up a million apiece in a few years, were definitely not of the intellectual type. Factor could not read anything, while Moe confined himself to "scratch sheets."

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We had to see the Victoria Falls, the world's greatest cataract, twice as high and twice as wide as Niagara. We had seen the place so many times on the movies that we were not as impressed as we should have been. Still, it was magnificent, and like so many things in Africa, it has been left unspoiled, just as it was when Livingstone discovered it. Everyone had ideas of the best time to view the falls, with good reasons and seasons, but we simply went. The approach to the Devil's Cataract was through the Rain Forest, and I was not as enthusiastic about this dank jungle as most visitors, as I thought of the dangers of a night out in such a place. There is plenty of game

around, south and west of the falls, including sable and zebra, but most people there seemed to be honeymooners from different parts of the Rhodesias. This is the only place where David Livingstone ever carved his initials on a tree, a piece of common vanity of which he wrote apologetically in later years. He need not have bothered, as his name is immortalized in a Rhodesian town and in many other places.

Bathing in the river was prohibited, because of crocodiles, but we would not have bathed in any case. Afraid of bilharzia, we had decided to give all the East African rivers a miss, from the Zambesi to the Indian Ocean.

There were big stories about the wages paid in Northern Rhodesia across the Zambesi. Twenty-five pounds a week for dishwashers, forty pounds a week for electricians, and so on. The copper boom was on. The D.P.s from Eastern Europe were well to the fore in the scramble, and there were stories of wild west battles in the streets of the shacktowns. The women who had been demoralized by life in the slave camps of the Nazis and Russians were lost to shame, and there were serious race relation problems, solved by common sense. The natives were the first to draw a sharp distinction between the two types of white. The distinction is indeed great, and showed how Europe had moved from civilization to barbarism in a single generation. In the face of such problems of today the accepted codes of behaviour and of government offer no solution, as they presuppose a general acceptance of a moral standard that does not exist.

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The ruins of Zimbabwe and Inyanga have presented a puzzle to three generations of investigators. Zimbabwe is such an ancient deserted city as Rider Haggard imagined for Kor in his romance *She*, but it is not true, as popularly assumed, that he took his idea from the ruins. Prior to the book he had never even visited them, and if he had heard of them in his youth in Africa, it can only have been as the echo of an echo. The official who sat above the ruins fifty years ago, trying to compute the number of errors in the book's account was engaged on a hopeless task. Haggard had not known anything of the locality. His book was, instead, a wonderful example of the writer's prophetic insight. It is not the apparent errors that count, but the amazing similarity.

Some archaeologists today take the view, claiming the 1929 survey as a guide, that the buildings are of fairly recent structure. There is talk of a Bantu civilization about the twelfth century A.D. Efforts to ascribe the origin to an ancient culture and another race are smiled at,

if rather uncertainly, as romanticism. The present officials take up a more reasonable standpoint, which is that nothing definite is known. From such a point progress can be made.

I would no more ascribe the origin of the great ruins to the Bantus than I would ascribe Hadrian's Wall to the ancient Briton barbarians, or the mighty Inca fortresses to the naked savages of the Amazon. Where else have the Bantus done any serious building in Africa? The whole essence of these primitive peoples is the shortness of life, and joy in the fleeting moment. People who build to last are inspired by a different point of view.

When he did eventually visit the ruins Sir Rider Haggard did not associate them with native tribesmen. Nor did Dr. Francis Brett Young, who made the powerful comment, in 1952, that the existence of statues of the hawk-eyed goddess Astarte (now at the Bulawayo Museum) must widen the field of enquiry. I should think so, too.

There is the significance of the *Chowa manganese mine*, ten miles from Broken Hill, which must have been exploited long before the days of Portuguese visitors to Africa. In 1934 Dr. R. A. Dart pointed out that manganese was freely used in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, in pottery glazing, etc. A high technical knowledge was needed to work the mine. The remains of many ancient tools were discovered there, including quartzite wedges, grinding plates, axes, and hammers. The native tribes have never known anything of the use of manganese.

About twenty Ancient Egyptian words can be traced in the languages of the Rhodesian natives today. Perhaps this is mere coincidence. Perhaps *wanga*, meaning long life in the Uwulala language has nothing in common with the Ancient Egyptian *ankh*, the symbol of eternity carried by the Pharaohs. Perhaps the turns of phrase in the native language—Child of the Sun to describe a fair-headed European—have nothing in common with ancient thought.

But what of the Kamimba ritual in the Rhodesias? A Kamimba is a conical hut-altar, three feet high, with an eastern door to admit the sun, and a door in the west, near which the spirit of the dead is said to reside, and through which offerings are placed. Is it an accident that the structure resembles a pyramid?

J. E. Stephenson had a theory that the Bantus or original natives of this area were descendants of the Hyksos people driven out of Egypt about 1600 B.C. But why should not the settlers have been the Hyksos themselves? The idea that in ancient times people could not cover great distances has been disproved by Heyerdahl. As for people like my wife and me, we have not the academic status or knowledge of languages to propound theories.

The archaeologist of the future will need nuclear physics and

chemistry as well as his present skills, while the possibilities of aerial photography-survey have not yet been fully realized.

What strange people the long-beard must be, to think that the Easter Islands statues were just local native jobs, or that the Indians of the Andes alone were responsible for the megalithic Tiahuanaco and Sacsahuaman! If two commercial travellers from another planet came across the ruins of the Pentagon and the Capitol amid Indian wigwams in an America bereft of the whites, would they not say, "Some other blokes must have been here at one time?"

I had best be careful what I say, however, for whenever archaeologists talk to me they seem to assume automatically that I belong to the race of Vandals, who chop and smash everything in sight in a frantic search for gold and jewels. I have only to approach a ruin for officials to appear and read the Riot Act. May I assure them that, although I may lack a sense of reverence, I am not one of those who approach any Ancient Monument with curses, a *sjambok* in hand, and blasting charges in boxes?

The ruins were only a short run from Fort Victoria, and comprised an acropolis about two hundred feet high on a kopje, and an elliptical temple of fragments within two walls of massive construction, with obelisks on the highest ground. There is a ravine about half a mile long between the acropolis and the temple, so that the whole site is a network of ruins and walls. It is an extremely romantic location, one of the wonders of Africa. The stone girdle is thirty feet high and fifteen feet thick in some places. I was inevitably reminded of the Inca temples of the Andes, with which I was familiar, and although the ruins of Zimbabwe are not so grandiose, they present another aspect of those ancient builders and architects who thought and worked in Cyclopean terms. There is a positive meanness about much of our modern building which may fairly reflect the thought of the age, turned inwards in a fascination with its own weakness, like much of modern art and literature.

We now know the results of the efforts of two American physicists who tried to discover the age of the ruins by radio-carbon methods.

Two pieces of timber supporting a drain in the walls were checked for isotope carbon 14, the methods employed being similar to those used by the University of Chicago in its brilliant success with the tombs of the Pharaohs of Egypt. The period of the timber employment was between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred years ago.

This is a proof that the ruins date from a much earlier period than had been considered probable before 1952. As the Keeper of Antiquities at the National Museum, Bulawayo, had pointed out, there is still no definite pointer to the real age of the two square miles of

ruins. But Southern Rhodesians will be cheered to know that the pointer has been put back a thousand years from where it rested before.

Zimbabwe is beautiful. There are pink Zimbabwe creepers everywhere, sealing-wax flowers, mimosa and acacia. There are stories of other ruined temples and suchlike in the country, but if they were as impressive as this they must surely have been found. Francis Ryskes-Chandler, who died near my home, believed he knew the location of another Zimbabwe in the Amatonga forest. He said he had found it north of the old route from Zimbabwe to Sofala, the ancient port for gold shipment. Ryskes-Chandler, an Englishman, was in dead earnest. He died young, as did Wells, the hunter, who went down with blackwater on his way back to this district. Twenty years before, there had been an expedition, but nothing had come of it. I believe the members went down with fever. It is a tricky place. A bank clerk who worked for the African Banking Corporation had a go, but died before he could have a proper look at the forest. Zimbabwe itself is healthy enough, but the low-lying lands further north are rife with fever, and much of the territory is unknown. Africa is a spacious land. There is still plenty of room for new marvels. When Barney Barnato first went out he had fifty pounds capital, and had visions of living on this while he looked around the diggings. He thought in London terms, of the diggings a short run from Cape Town. But it took him a sixty days trek across the Karroo to the diamond fields. We shall always remember him as the first millionaire to walk around the Savoy Grill on his hands.

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSIONS

A small candle in the darkness of Africa ; what might be done.

It is better to light a small candle than to complain of the darkness of Africa. This is the kind of thought that should animate those who dispose of the enormous product of taxation.

It is always easy, say the administrators, to explain what might be done in the way of planning, ignoring the little local fiddles, the impregnable conceit of politicians, and the impervious ivory heads of some upper-crust nabobs. After all, a writer cannot get any promotion. He cannot become anything more than a writer, while a Clerk, Grade III, may rise to the dizzy height of a mention in the honours list for one of the more obscure orders. Men have committed crimes for less.

The writers should continue, however. Their books may be ignored, lying dusty on the shelves of the British Museum or the Library of Congress. Ideas can remain fertile. In a few years, some bright spirit may come along who intends to get things done, and only needs ideas. There they are, lying in wait.

In our case our main conclusions were the need for immediate pilot projects for stock-watering in the Kalahari, improved communications, and pest extermination, particularly of tsetse and malarial mosquito. Small-scale experiments in the Kaokoveld and Namib could pay good dividends, especially in the areas north of Kamanjab and around Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

The best area for ranching in the Kalahari is that north of the Bamangwato Reserve up to the Nata river, and the area between Makalamahedi and the Shashi. There is good pasture possibility to the west, near the South-west border, and all this part could be opened up with a few pioneer ventures, preferably run by young people under twenty-five years old, or thereabouts. Old people make poor pioneers, but they are very good at crippling anything new.

The Caprivi Zipfel is a waste of time today, and there is urgent need for roads and airstrips, which will be a dead loss financially, in the beginning. It must be remembered, however, that reputations are made by the work men and women do after working hours, not in

them. There is a big chance for someone here, and also a big risk, with all the sleeping sickness and malaria, and the wild life. The alternative is to let the place lie there like a dead cod, as it has done since 1915. Any of the governments concerned which move in here would have to be prepared to write off the cost of development. The possibilities are great, and the present officials have proved that work can be done, despite everything. Far better to start off with a certain loss of a few thousands, and big possibilities, than to spend millions and expect tens of millions and then sell off for a few thousands to the people who could have handled the job on a shoestring in the first place. It is also a sad truth that the people who get the spending of millions are great hands at delegating authority, and if this is delegated far enough down the man who knows what has to be done finds he cannot get the tools and the people he needs. The man who knows how to win over a committee is very often by nature the wrong man to deal with an emergency. For example, people who have "had it cushy" all their lives are extremely credulous, in a cultured way, and are liable to flail about in the world of buyers and sellers like a club champion playing "Little Mo." One cannot help contrasting the fancy footwork of Rhodes, Barnato, Robinson, Beit, and company with that of the government agencies of the nineteen forties and fifties.

The existence of the great Kalahari Pans and the permanent grass around suggests that the white clay subsoil is a water absorbent and preservative, and that a system of underground inlets connects them all. If this proves to be true, the way is open for a general scheme. There may be more water there than we imagine. The water of the oases in the Western Desert has nothing to do with river flow, but is the store from the deeper layers, accumulated thousands of years ago. This idea was first proposed by G. Rohlfs in *Physische Geographie und Meteorologie der Libysche Wüste*, and expanded by Lyons, Ball, Sandford, Hellstrom, and G. W. Murray.

The brilliant research work of these scientists suggests that there is an important field for discovery in the survey of water tables throughout the arid zones.

One consideration that has not yet been touched upon for Southwest Africa is the inter-relationship of the great salt deposits and climate. Great salt formations inhibit the deposit of dew and consequently affect the saturation of the local atmosphere. The paucity of geological and meteorological data for the remote areas prevents any reliable forecasts. It may be that investigators will be able to tap low-lying water-bearing beds in many areas now thought of as desert. While prospects for such plans appear poor at the moment, the continuing pressure of population and the

uneasiness of the world's food and agricultural experts will in time combine to create opportunities.

We must remember that the great civilization of Ancient Egypt was based on the agricultural revolution brought about by using the Nile water in new ways, clearing the swamps of the delta, and organizing irrigation. In recent years the Union government has achieved remarkable results by flooding a big stretch of eroded veld. The African industrial revolution is not on its way, it is here already, and it needs to be steered.

Much of the trouble in Africa today is due to the economic revolution, now making rapid progress. The creation of a large African wage-earning working class, with standards similar to those of the Balkans a generation ago, is a noisy and awkward business. The attempts to revive the old idolatries in Swaziland, Kenya, and Benin cannot succeed, any more than the machine-wreckers in England could succeed in the early nineteenth century.

What is happening in Africa is what has already happened in Europe—the movement of the peasants into the centres of manufacture. The escapists on both sides are trying to put the clock back. Yet no one really believes that either Boer or British paternalism can return, and tribal warfare under petty African chiefs is even more absurd. It is not much use slicing philosophical salami about ordered progress by stages when the black man's problem is how to feed a family on two shillings. The boss who pays an extra sixpence a day is doing more to solve Africa's problems than all the philosophers and Comet round-trip specialists on native affairs.

There are many hopeful signs, especially from people who get on with a job, doing their best, and not worrying about the future. The Belgians gave the British an object lesson in running a colony when they sank large amounts of capital in the Congo, got the natives cracking with payments by results and the devil take the hindmost, and reaped great rewards, plus industrial peace. It is true that no one could have worked harder for the natives than the British administrators, but this labour of love and duty would have had more striking results had it been seen alongside a rapidly expanding industrial economy.

The British are always amazed when they hear Americans criticizing their colonies as "poverty-stricken dumps" because they know how much hard work has been done, and there is a British tendency to confuse the picturesque and romantic with the sordid and inefficient, plus the well-known English habit of pretending that something unpleasant has not really happened. The difference between the British desert towns and the new oil towns of Southern Arabia, with Coca-Cola, ice-cream, and hamburgers laid on, is very

great. To read the English books of pre-1945, it would appear that the desert Arabs were all fanatic Moslems who would kill the *feringhi* at the shake of a *burnous*. The traveller, it appeared, would have to live on dates and squat on the sand, cracking sheep's eyes between his teeth. The Americans cannot have read these books—they simply moved in with their trucks, wearing jockey caps and blue jeans, carrying huge tool-kits. It is true that the dollar spoke first, and talked big, too, but so did the pound sterling not so long ago.

Take an African example, and a good one. In Namaqualand, five miles from Springbok, there are sixty U.S. and Canadian men, women, and children, on the copper mine site. The pay is high, living is cheap, and people are saving plenty. The winter is bitter cold, while for nine months of the year the temperature is over 100°F. The men have three-year contracts. There are no trees, apart from one or two peppers, in this waste, which bears no resemblance to Palm Springs. On the pay roll are six hundred South Africans, a thousand coloured, and two thousand Kaffirs. With a total capital equipment of three and half millions sterling, six million pounds worth of copper was produced in 1952 and sent to Europe for refining. Already there are swimming baths, a club, a billiard saloon, schools, a golf course, and a social centre. A million gallons of water a day is obtained from the dry bed of the Buffels river, run through 18 miles of pipeline, and pumped four thousand feet up to the copper mine in the mountains.

This kind of project must be duplicated all over if the Africans are going to improve their living standards, as the population is increasing so rapidly that existing standards will be halved in fifty years without industrialization. In fact, the lowering of the infant mortality rate by the doctors and engineers in Africa and Asia has made industrialization inevitable. It would really have been better to start off with the industrialization, the way the Belgians did.

President Truman, in 1949, declared that technical knowledge and capital investment must be made available "for the improvement and growth of undeveloped areas." Mr. Truman rightly stressed the importance of mechanical power in his statement. His commissioner made a survey in 1950, to estimate the cost of a Fourth Point programme, as it was called. He decided that the United States should set on one side a sum of nearly half a dollar per head for the populations concerned, covering Central and South America, Middle East, S.E. Asia, Southern Asia, and Africa. This meant an expenditure of 500 million dollars for the year 1952-53 by the U.S., to which could be added a sum of approximately half that amount from the British Empire. The British figure is surprisingly high, considering that they have fought three wars since 1900

without gaining any economic advantages, and is a tribute to the recuperative power of British industry.

The various African governments were asked what their needs would be under the Fourth Point programme and they were not slow to reply. They took the advice of Cecil Rhodes: "In Africa think big." Compared with what they demanded the U.S. and British contributions together appeared a drop in the mealie-tub. The disparity between demand and supply of capital should not be taken too seriously. In any case the States and Britain cannot afford any more at this time. What is important is to make a beginning, and help the Africans to help themselves.

Before we went to Africa we were aware of the deep pessimism about the continent's future that is prevalent in Europe and America. This was partly due to the difficulty experienced by the press in making the Korean war interesting. Any little riot in Africa hit the front page, and the Mau-Mau business was given the full treatment, although the number of Europeans killed in Kenya could be counted on two hands.

This pessimism about the future is not shared by the peoples of southern Africa. They are accustomed to the local squabbles and troubles. Five hundred casualties over the New Year celebrations looks bad in the European press, but any citizen of Johannesburg or Capetown would think it a normal result of high spirits, like a battleship captain looking at a charge-list on New Year's Day. It is all a matter of climate and exuberance. When I was in Russia no one thought much of Red Army men firing revolvers to blow off steam, and there was a drunk wagon that picked up the sodden and unconscious from the place where the sidewalks would be in a western town. In the Chin Hills all the men get drunk on *zu* at every opportunity, and in the British colony of the Falkland Isles there is little for the white inhabitants (who are still denied a vote!) to do at week-ends except surround themselves with bottles.

Africa is, in fact, a livelier place than Europe. When the Africans set about enjoying themselves they do so in a big way, and if a few heads are broken in the process, this is nothing out of the way. As long as the guns are in the hands of the Europeans there is not much chance of anything like real trouble, and even the most fanatical members of the ABQ (Associated British Queers) are hardly likely to make any impression on the white settlers save one of disgust.

Most of the beard-and-sandal-boys from the home country with their pamphlets about the horrors of Hiroshima and the need for brotherly love are out to make a name for themselves, and are up against a big obstacle in the giggling of their African associates, who

can see the funny side of the whole set-up. The brighter African leaders can see clearly that it is not a conflict between black and white. The white Africans and the black Africans both stand to gain from the prosperity now opening out. The Afrikaners claim with much justification that they are better Africans than anyone else, saying in their earthy way: "This country was a midden until we cleaned it up, and if anyone wants to take it off us the runners will go round the farms again assembling the Commandos." No matter what is decided elsewhere, they will do it, too. If the Russians ever tried to occupy South Africa, they would learn things about war the Germans never taught them.

The continuance of European control of the African continent can be assumed for a long period, despite the checker-board moves and counter-moves north of the Equator. The self-governing African territories of Liberia and Ethiopia, one American and the other British-inspired, are depressing affairs, and the nominal independence given to a few other states is simply a modern formula for the old-fashioned and under-a-cloud "protectorate".

Great changes are, however, taking place in the emergence of the African to full citizenship and a share in responsible government, notably in Central and West Africa. Even in the places where racial intolerance is said to be worst, millions of pounds, and more millions every year, is being spent on native education and welfare services.

Only a small portion of the continent has been properly surveyed, and there are doubtless great natural resources of all kinds. After all, in the one place where big capital was invested, the world's prime source of uranium ore was located. The same thing is now happening on the Rand, under joint British-American inspiration. The co-operation of the big Canadian interests in exploiting the Gold Coast bauxite, working with the U.K. and Gold Coast governments, shows another possibility.

The British should have opened up the entire continent half a century ago, as Rhodes begged them to do, at a time when railways could be built cheaply, and land could be had for the asking, or even without it. There was another chance in the depressed 'thirties, when prices fell, and there were millions of unemployed. The British governments, however, preferred to call the queues of rusting men in the dole-towns "Problems of the Special Areas", just as they called the Untouchables in India the "Scheduled Castes". Give a dog a good name and he stops barking!

With the spread of education and the gradual disappearance of the mutton-heads from the high offices their family connections have procured for them, the experimental approach to Africa will return. It is already to be found in southern Africa. The white settlers

there have watched a splendid civilization rise out of a wilderness. There are people on the Reef who remember it as just that. Instead of torturing themselves with self-doubts about a lot of rubbishy ideas from central European cellars, they get on with their jobs and enjoy life. To them a dirty neck and an unshaven chin means not a free soul, but a bum. They throw their doors open to the stranger, the way Rhodes did at Groote Schuur, and they say, "Welcome, brother. I hope you're not just passing through."

CHAPTER XVIII

EAST COAST

Lourenço Marques ; brick-red faces turned homewards ; and the next ?

BEING so near to Portuguese East it seemed a good idea to have a quick look-see. The whole country has a bad name for malaria, and at this time there was a violent outbreak of serious malarial fever both in Mozambique and the Transvaal, with several deaths, one of these a woman we had seen just before. Our immunity from the disease while on trek had given us a lot of confidence, and we chanced it.

The territory is more modern and more thickly populated than we had imagined. Nearly six million people live in Portuguese East, about two per cent of them white, or at least, non-native, in the charming local phrase. I would not fancy a life on the swamps of the coast, but many Indians from across the Indian Ocean make a good living. The bulk of the whites are in the big cities, such as Beira and Lourenço Marques.

It was to Lourenço Marques that we went, because I had always hoped to see Delagoa Bay. I had been told that I would have to show I was in possession of the equivalent of three thousand U.S. dollars before being allowed in, but the amount was really twelve hundred dollars per person, and applied only to immigrants. Temporary visitors such as ourselves had no trouble, despite all the talk about hard and soft currencies. The Portuguese officials were kind and the people hospitable and friendly. We could have gone buffalo-hunting on the banks of the Limpopo had the season been right.

Huge numbers of natives from Portuguese East go down to the Transvaal by rail and road, and relations between the two countries seemed to be good and close. There is, of course, a wide difference in attitude towards colour problems.

There is an English Club at Lourenço Marques, and even an English language newspaper. There were modern buildings, cinemas, taxis, and buses. We found all this rather depressing, perhaps because we had held on to romantic notions conjured up by the name of the place for so long. We should have been overjoyed at the prospect of seeing our own countrymen. Somehow we were not. Several times at the back of beyond, on hearing another Britisher was

in the vicinity, I have had an immediate impulse to go into hiding. Maybe the other man felt the same way. I cannot explain this satisfactorily.

Bathed, pressed, and organized, we took our place among visiting tourists, happy to be again anonymous and unnoticed. It reminded me of Harold Nicolson's joy when, after the declaration of the count at a bye-election he lost, he could sit on top of a bus in London, free from the limelight. Instead of, "What you going to do about this, eh?" it was, "Where to, mate?"

The rain made us feel at home, and the presence of first-class American goods sent us off on an orgy of window-shopping. The Portuguese and coloured boys sat around reading lurid comics about the wild west. There was bubble gum, nylons, refrigerators, and vest-pocket cameras guaranteed to take good pictures. How different from the Delagoa Bay of the old ivory traders.

We decided against a little hundred-miles trip upcoast to the mouth of the Limpopo, on which we would have been accompanied by sugar-cutters and relieving officials. There was no point, we thought, in going without some kind of objective or excuse. One afternoon we played with the idea of making the best of our way back through Tanganyika and Uganda to the Sudan, with a chance to visit the Valley of the Kings, then going down the Nile, and getting one of the cheap Italian steamers from Alexandria. But the economics of the journey were against it. However we twisted, we could not wriggle through. One or two local people had set out on such journeys, but no one, as far as we could discover, had got through unscathed.

In the heavy heat we watched porters loading cashew nuts on peculiar craft and talked with the longshoremen about a yacht at Zanzibar, alleged to be in the hands of an eccentric gentleman who was seeking other eccentrics to accompany him on some long-distance quest. We were not happy at the implications of our being given this information.

Ian Colqhoun, a Scot who had farmed in Rhodesia and had actually made money by growing ground-nuts in Mozambique, gave us a lurid account of the British government's failures in Tanganyika. He was on his way to Canada, and so far west in Canada that it seemed likely his next trip home would be via Japan. He was one of those Scots, still to be found, who wander the globe, turning their hand to anything, despite the frantic efforts of governments and lesser men to keep them in one place. Just as the net is closing in the bird flies off.

We had hoped to see a slice of Portuguese gaiety at one of the Lourenço casinos, with exotic tropical beauties throwing thousand-escudo notes on the roulette table, and sinister fat men in white drill

suits presiding at the baccarat section. Alas! The place we had heard about was now an ordinary night club.

We saw the native market in the early morning, and came back with fruits we could not name, which did not taste as well as they looked. We were invited to the Club de Polana, and took a motor launch up the Incomati River to see the hippopotamus. But there were no bearded men with leopard-skin hat-bands, riding ahead of a column of bearers, each with his load of ivory tusks.

The news seemed much the same as when we had left Upington. Peggy said it was depressing to read, and that she had felt much better when she did not know what was happening. Someone in Germany was experimenting with a seismic bomb that could create earthquakes, and would make the hydrogen bomb feel very small, and there was hope of a new bacteriological weapon, radio-controlled, that would spread pestilence far and wide. One of the Portuguese papers seemed to think that this pestilence bomb may have been dropped already, in view of the sharp rise in the death-rate in Western Europe and the Americas. It was all good tourist-trade propaganda.

There is an extensive Portuguese literature on the ancient mines of Mozambique and Rhodesia, and not much has been said about this in Britain. I imagine it to be an almost virgin field for the research worker. It must not be forgotten that Africa was once a Portuguese preserve. Vasco da Gama had ships here four and a half centuries ago. According to Tomaso Lopez, of da Gama's outfit, there was a very rich goldfield in Sofala province that had been owned by the Middle East kings in Solomon's day. That would be twenty-four centuries earlier than da Gama. Three years later E. Pereira advised the King of Portugal that the mine had been located and occupied. All these accounts point to Sofala, and what makes them worth studying is the existence of good maps of S.E. Africa in Portuguese books 400 years old. The Lisbon earthquake is the probable cause of the neglect of this rich field, as the charts and records of the great voyages were destroyed, with a few exceptions. The later books seem to have been considered essays in romance by Anglo-Saxon commentators, but one should beware of the experts' veto. The mineralogists said there were no prospects of big diamond pipes in the Union, away from rivers, just before the big finds. They then went on record as saying the Rand goldfields would not be an economic proposition, on the eve of the greatest strikes. The trouble with experts is that they can tell you where they have been, but not where you are going.

My mild interest in Portuguese archaeology brought me in contact with a gentleman called Assis, who had worked in Angola. He

took me to the poor quarter, where men lay in the shade, mending fishing nets. We passed barbers' shops and heard loud arguments about pieces in the Lisbon newspapers, just in on the train. There were little cafés with good food and port wine—hardly the thing for this climate, but popular enough. There were shipping chandlers with their negro clerks, talking learnedly about coastal runs to strange-sounding names. There was good talk about experiences in Portuguese and Spanish Guinea, on the other coast. In the narrow streets a jumble of black, chocolate, yellow, khaki, and white children played together.

I was questioned about Basutoland, but had to confess my ignorance. Villainous-looking gentlemen in soiled tropical whites told me that they had heard rumours—with appropriate Latin gestures—about the Basuto chiefs. I kept thinking of the old slogan, "Balliol for the Basutos," but kept it to myself, as this brand of English humour would be too difficult to explain in the humid heat. It appeared that there was a certain amount of unauthorized trading here and there, on the Basutoland border. None of the people present was mixed up with this, but they had met other traders who knew about it. What had impressed the commercial men was the unwillingness of the Basuto chiefs to encourage whites into certain parts of the highlands. Did I know that no proper geological survey had been carried out in the mountains? Was it not likely that the great wealth of some of the chiefs in the Protectorate was due to secret knowledge of mineral resources? How was it the Basutos who went to work in the mines at Kimberley arrived there, in many cases, with quite a good knowledge of the business? It was well known that there had been great volcanoes in the Drakensberg and Malutu mountains. What did that suggest? Now a Portuguese passport holder might attract a certain amount of attention in Basutoland, but a Britisher, who already had a good excuse for being there—that would be different. In fact, the authorities would not be able to keep me out.

Such a proposition appealed to my sporting instincts, but as a former student of economics I begged the pardon of my hearers for introducing such a prosaic note into the discussion, particularly as it was on such a high plane of scholarship. But how many *escudos* were there in it for me, remembering that I was not alone, and would be required to travel in reasonable comfort if I were not to arouse the interest of unsavoury characters such as officials and suchlike obstacles to trade? I missed the best part of the discussion that followed, as it was in Portuguese, very fast and fierce. An offer was made, but it was not so much a temptation as a gesture. I thanked my hosts for their hospitality, and left them to their schemes.

My Portuguese friends told me that the municipal park at Lourenço Marques, the *Fontaine les Albasini*, is named for their most distinguished trader citizen, who had started life as an officer in the Portuguese Navy. This man led parties of Shangaan porters, carrying stores and ivory deep into the interior at a time when the Swazis and Zulus were still on the loose. He established a trail through the Drakensberg and along Sekukuniland to the Zoutspansberg, sticking to the mountains so that he would not lose animals with tsetse. As Albasini's men had guns, the local chiefs could do nothing. The *indunas* recognized him as chief of the Shangaans, who were in fact a mobile *impi*, hundreds strong. More African than the Africans, the white chief made war against tribes who disputed his progress or interfered with his ivory poaching. The Boer Republics failed to establish order in the area, and Albasini was eventually the *de facto* king of the Zoutspansberg.

The white king of the Shangaans ruled his followers with a strong hand until his death. As ordered government spread the authorities refused to recognize the rights of his son to the Shangaan chieftainship. But if a vote were taken today among the Shangaans the son would be reinstated. Their attitude is clear from their refusal to appoint a new chief. Africa is full of such stories. The romantic novelists have based their stories on facts. The truth is often more fantastic, if less patterned, than the writer's plot.

Barnato had never lived in a house of his own, and only ordered a Park Lane mansion at the behest of his friends. Looking at it, he said, "I'll never live in it". Rhodes allowed anyone to roam around his estate and even his house when he was Premier. Sometimes "bums" were found, reading books in his library, but they were never turned away. After taking his examinations at Oxford, he returned to South Africa to work a steam engine himself, despite his wealth. His knowledge of the classics did not save him from ridicule when he burst the boiler of the pumping engine. There was something about such men that seems lacking today in the intellectual vanguard, steeped in Kafka, Lorca, Freud, and the new brand of American novel, that equates responsibility with guilt. It has got to the stage where a man feels he should apologize if he enjoys anything; as if a good laugh were an indulgence of his lower nature. At all events, it is not the attitude of those who grill *duiker* steaks and unroll their blankets under the *krantzies* of the old Transvaal.

We set our brick-red faces for home, and caught up with a large bag of mail that had been following us around. There were letters in buff envelopes starting *Dear Sir*, *Unless* . . . and others that omitted the *Dear*, while one went straight into its story, without

benefit of superscription. How different from Victorian days, when an escaping prisoner, wrote *P.P.C.* on the envelope of his letter of thanks to the Boer commandant. *P.P.C.—pour prendre congé.*

Peggy said "Why go back? Here's the Indian Ocean. On the other side is India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Himalayas. What have we got to lose?"

"Yes, and come back by way of China, then through Siberia to Moscow, and home by way of the Arctic route. Don't forget Marco Polo was an *AI* man. Two sets of bucket quoits and I'm winded."

Peggy produced a letter. "This is from a man who wants to go with us to the Karakoram. Where's that?"

"You get to Kanchenjunga, and turn sharp right, I think. Or is it left?"

"It sounds just the job."